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THE LIFE OF OUR LIFE.



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THE LIFE OF OUR LIFE.

PART THE SECOND.

THE PUBLIC LIFE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.

V.

The Training of the Apostles.

(PART II.)

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THE TRAINING OF THE APOSTLES

(PART II.)

BY

HENRY JAMES COLERIDGE

OF THE SOCIETY OF JESUS



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AMISSA DRACHMA REGIO
RECONDITA EST ÆRARIO
ET GEMMA DETERSO LUTO
NITORE VINCIT SIDERA

JESU MEDELA VULNERUM
SPES UNA PÆNITENTIUM
PER MAGDALENÆ LACRYMAS
PECCATA NOSTRA DILUAS

PREFACE.

THE subject-matter of the present volume of the *Public Life of our Lord* is furnished by the narrative of the Evangelists relating to four or five summer months of His Ministry in Galilee, in the second year of His preaching. We find ourselves, in the opening chapter, at the Pentecost of that second year, and the last incident in the volume is a missionary circuit in that part of the country, probably late in the autumn, shortly after the first appearance in the Gospel history of the illustrious penitent who is honoured in the Church as St. Mary Magdalene. The scene of our Lord's labours is in the country parts of Galilee, and, as far as we can gather, He was only once or twice, and that for a short time, in Capharnaum during these months. He did not visit Jerusalem at all. The malignant opposition which had been set on foot against Him after the Pasch of this year, and which produced a coalition between the Pharisees and the Herodians with the object of destroying Him, had much influence in determining that comparative retirement from great centres of authority or of population by which this period is marked, and its effect can be traced even in the teaching of our Lord at this

time. The persecution did not die away in consequence of His gentle prudence in seeming to yield to it, and we shall find it, at the beginning of the next volume, breaking out with increased intensity of malice.

The chief occupation of our Lord at this time, beyond His usual and unremitting exertions in preaching to the people, was undoubtedly the training and the formation of the Twelve Apostles. At the beginning of this volume we find Him selecting them, finally and formally, from the general company of His disciples. This great act of our Lord was followed by the delivery of the Sermon on the Plain, which fills a considerable part of the present volume, although it has not been necessary to treat it at the same length with the Sermon on the Mount, on which it is in the main founded. It may either be considered in itself, as a monument of the moral teaching which our Lord put forward at this period of His Public Ministry, or it may be regarded as a model which the Apostles might follow, in the adaptation, to different audiences, of truths which had already been taught, but which were too important not to be repeated again and again.

Except the Sermon on the Plain, this volume contains none of the greater documents in which our Lord's teaching is drawn out at length by the Evangelists. But the incidents of these few months, as far as they remain to us, are full of surpassing interest. They embrace the splendid miracles on the servant of the Centurion and the son of the widow of Naim. This last miracle seems to have drawn forth from St. John

Baptist, in his prison, that beautiful and ingenious witness to our Lord which consisted in the mission of some of his disciples with the significant question, ‘Art Thou He that art to come, or do we look for another?’ and which our Lord answered by working a great number of miracles of mercy in the presence of the messengers. A cluster of incidents follows, which seem naturally to hang together—such as the great witness borne to St. John by our Lord Himself, His upbraiding of the men of that generation for their treatment of Himself and His Precursor, and His threatening prophecies concerning the condemnation of Corozain, Bethsaida, and Capharnaum. These, again, naturally lead on to that rejoicing in spirit of our Lord, when He broke out in thanksgiving to His Father for having hidden the mysteries of the Kingdom from the wise and prudent, and for having revealed them to little ones. Then followed, as St. Matthew tells us, His declaration that all things had been put into His hands by His Father, and that most loving invitation to all who are labouring and burthened to come to Him, to learn of Him, to take His yoke upon them, and so to find rest and refreshment to their souls.

The last three chapters of the present volume are devoted to what may be considered the great typical answer to this invitation of our Lord, on the part of the blessed Magdalene. It is very suggestive indeed, with regard to the perfect accuracy of the Evangelists, and the manner in which their narratives fit in one to the other, when arranged in a Harmony based on the true

principles of such a work, to see that the natural place of this incident, the account of which we owe to St. Luke, is immediately after the invitation to the labouring and burthened as related by St. Matthew. St. Mary Magdalene closes the volume for us, as the chief of the band of pious ladies, who now began to devote themselves and their riches to the blessed work of ministering to the temporal necessities of our Lord and His companions.

Thus the present volume refers almost exclusively to scenes of quiet, holy teaching, and a few magnificent miracles. The calm is not broken by any disputation with the Jewish Scribes, though our Lord may well be thought to have had them, and their evil influence on others, constantly in His mind. The beginning of the next volume will open to us new manifestations of their malignant hatred of our Lord, which had a still greater effect on His conduct than the conspiracy with the Herodians against His life. The point at which the exhaustion of the space allotted to one of these volumes makes it necessary to stop, is therefore highly convenient, as it enables us to leave the generally happy impressions of the narrative of these few months unbroken by the incidents which so very sorely grieved the Sacred Heart of our Lord.

H. J. C.

London, Feast of St. Francis Xavier, 1882.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.	PAGE
<i>The Choosing of the Apostles.</i>	
St. Mark iii. 13—19; St. Luke vi. 12—16; <i>Vita Vitæ Nostre</i> , § 46.	
Discouraging features in our Lord's reception	1
Opposition to Him, and His retirement	2
St. Matthew dwelling on the prophecies	3
The bruised reed and smoking flax	4
Example of our Lord corresponding to His precepts .	5
Consequences of the rejection of St. John's baptism .	6
Terrible crimes of our Lord's enemies	7
The Divine Counsels worked out by them	8
Apparent defeat of our Lord .	9
'The lesser glory of God' .	10
Foundation of the Church carried on	10
The Apostles trained in adversity	11
Gospel accounts of the choosing of the Apostles . .	12
Strict meaning of the Apostolate	13
In]what sense it remains in the Church	14
Apostolate now founded in a wider sense	14
Multiplication of preachers .	15
Account of St. Mark and St. Luke	16
Our Lord's prayer	17
Selection and vocation of the Twelve	18
 CHAPTER II.	
<i>First Outlines of the Apostolate.</i>	
St. Mark iii. 13—19; St. Luke vi. 12—16; <i>Vita Vitæ Nostre</i> , § 46.	
Four purposes in the choice of the Apostles	19
Great intimacy with our Lord	20
The lists of the Twelve	20
Traces of the religious life .	21
Peter, Andrew, Philip, Judas .	22
Personal intercourse of our Lord with each	23
Their openness with Him .	25
Little said of this in the Gospels	26
Their immense advance in grace	28
Our Lord as Director	29
Traditions of His method and manner	29
Hiddenness of our Lord's work	30
Character of the Christian community	31

PAGE	PAGE		
St. Paul on the 'following' of Christ	32	Early spread of Christianity	55
References in the Epistles	33	Preaching never neglected without detriment	56
Office of the Holy Ghost	34	Results on the spiritual life	57
Daily increase of love in the Apostles	34	Preaching may easily be underrated	58
Their life thus explained	35	Danger to hearers	59
Personal devotion to our Lord	36	Danger to preachers	59
Characters of single Apostles	38	Necessity of union with our Lord	60
Question as to Judas	39		
He was like the others when chosen	39		
Others might have fallen	41		
He was designed for a high throne	41		
General question as to God's foreknowledge	42		
Peculiar fitness of our Lord's relations with Judas	43		
Stability of our Lord's work thus shown	44		
Preeminence of God in forgiving	45		
Our Lord sharing the lot of His servants	45		
God bringing good out of evil	45		
Beginnings of Judas	46		
CHAPTER III.		CHAPTER IV.	
<i>The Office of the Preacher.</i>			
St. Mark iii. 13—19; St. Luke vi. 12—16; <i>Vita Vitæ Nostræ</i> , § 46.		St. Matt. iii. 13—19; St. Luke vi. 12—16; <i>Vita Vitæ Nostræ</i> , § 46.	
The preaching office grows out of union with our Lord	48	Twofold powers of the Apostles	62
Selection of this as the first function	49	Our Lord's miracles	63
Reasons for the preeminence of preaching	50	Evidences and symbols of His mission	64
St. Paul on preaching	51	Fitness of the power in the Apostles	65
'Foolishness of preaching'	52	Miracles animated by the spirit of mercy	66
Natural influence of the spoken word	52	Instinct of the relief of suffering	66
Modification by our Lord	53	Casting out devils	67
Oratory in the Apostolic age	54	Constant warfare with Hell	68
CHAPTER V.		CHAPTER V.	
<i>The Sermon on the Plain.</i>			
St. Luke vi. 17—49; <i>Vita Vitæ Nostræ</i> , § 47, 48, 49.		St. Luke vi. 17—49; <i>Vita Vitæ Nostræ</i> , § 47, 48, 49.	
The two 'Sermons' of our Lord	69		
Independent report of St. Luke	70		
Evidence of the Gospel history	71		
Rise of the persecution of our Lord	72		
Effects on the people	73		
Two-edged effect of preaching	74		
Differences between the Sermons	75		
Object of the Sermon on the Plain	76		
New series of Beatitudes	77		

PAGE	PAGE		
Omissions in the Sermon on the Plain	78	Danger of fulness and laughter	108
The four woes	79	Resting in temporal things	109
Further omissions	79	The applause of men	110
Our Lord returning to the former Sermon	80	CHAPTER VII.	
Almsdeeds, prayer, and fasting passed by	81	<i>The Precept of Charity.</i>	
Greater fulness of the second Sermon	81	St. Luke vi. 27—38; <i>Vita Vitæ Nostræ</i> , § 48.	
Another amplification	82	Our Lord addressing the multitude	112
Words used in a new connection	82	What our Lord omits to them	113
Conclusion of the second Sermon	83	Importance to all of almsgiving	114
Significance of the changes	84	Foundation of the precepts of charity	116
Difference of the audience	85	Love for the sake of God	116
Importance of the precept of charity	87	Goodness of God in this arrangement	117
Example of our Lord in this Sermon	87	Love and faith	118
CHAPTER VI.		Particular injunctions of our Lord	120
<i>The Blessings and the Woes.</i>		Extent of the love of our neighbour	121
St. Luke vi. 20—26; <i>Vita Vitæ Nostræ</i> , § 47.		Precept of love	121
The scene in St. Luke	89	Exercise of patience	123
The first Beatitude here given	91	Exercise of mercy	125
Blessings of actual poverty	92	Exercise of beneficence	125
Condition of the Apostles	94	Explanation of the doctrine	126
Blessing of 'hunger'	94	Why we are to love in this way	127
Blessing of 'weeping'	95	Charity without hope of reward	129
Material evils of life	96	Giving which brings us nothing	130
Persecution	97	'The Sons of the Highest'	130
Jewish excommunication	98	Imitation of God	131
Injunction to rejoice	99	In benefiting enemies	131
Observed by the Apostles	100	In blessing and benefiting calumniators	132
Treatment of the prophets	100	In unresisting charity	133
Special blessing of poverty	102	Our Lord's example as to this precept	134
The Father giving the Kingdom	103	God shows love sometimes in chastisement	135
Teaching of St. James	103	Other laws modifying this	135
Other special blessings	104		
The four woes	106		
Danger of riches	107		

	PAGE		PAGE
The prudent virgins	136	Two series of precepts	161
The petition of Zebedee's children refused	137	Measure for measure	163
God's ways with prayer	137	Importance of this rule	164
The love of God the motive	138	Impersonal form of language	165
What God may owe to us	139	Pleasure of the Sacred Heart	166
The mercifulness of God	140	Provision for human happiness	167
Commemorated in Scripture	141	An answer to objections	169
God always predisposed to mercy	142	Measure for measure in Providence	170
God rewards intentions and desires	143	Instances of the operation of this law	172
God rewards beyond all desert	144	Forgiveness of injuries	172
How God deals with those whom He punishes	145	Comments of the Fathers	174
He waits for and forewarns the sinner	146	Three considerations	175
He punishes less than we deserve	147	Others added	176
He forgives on easy conditions	148		
He gladly hears intercession	149		
His mercifulness in the next world	150		
Application of the satisfaction of the Saints	151		
His mercy in Purgatory	152		
He allows sufferings here to count as expiation	153		
How we may imitate Him	154		
CHAPTER VIII.			
<i>Measure for Measure.</i>			
St. Luke vi. 37, 38; <i>Vita Vitæ Nostræ</i> , § 48.			
Explanation of the four following precepts	156	Further differences between the two Sermons	178
'Judge not'	157	Different classes addressed	179
'Condemn not'	158	Different applications	180
Promise added to the precept 'Forgive, and it shall be forgiven'	159	The blind guides	181
'Give, and it shall be given'	160	First reference to Jewish teachers	182
	161	Disciples and masters	184
		Principle laid down by our Lord	185
		Motes and beams	186
		The Scribes and Pharisees	187
		Our Lord's way of speaking of them	188
		Trees and fruits	189
		The treasure of the heart	190
		Revelation of the heart in conduct	191
		The words general	193
		Conclusion of the Sermon on the Plain	193

CHAPTER X.	PAGE	CHAPTER XII.	PAGE
<i>The Centurion's Servant.</i>		<i>The Raising of the Widow's Son.</i>	
St. Matt. vii. 5—13; St. Luke vii. 1— 10; <i>Vita Vitæ Nostræ</i> , § 50.	1—	St. Luke vii. 11—16; <i>Vita Vitæ Nostræ</i> , § 51.	222
Order of events	19	Our Lord's visit to Capharnaum	223
Our Lord on His missionary circuits	197	Subsequent history of the Brethren	224
Our Lord again at Capharnaum	198	CHAPTER XIII.	
The Centurion and his servant	199	<i>Last Witness of St. John Baptist.</i>	
The Jews of Capharnaum	200	St. Matt. xi. 2—6; St. Luke vii. 17—23; <i>Vita Vitæ Nostræ</i> , § 52.	225
Virtue of the Centurion	201	News taken to St. John	226
His acquaintance with the Jewish religion	202	St. John in prison	227
The nobleman of Capharnaum	203	Watching our Lord's progress	228
St. Matthew and St. Luke	204	Effect of the opposition to Him	229
'Lord, trouble not Thyself'	205	Slowness of belief	230
A man under authority	206	CHAPTER XIV.	
Faith of the Centurion	206	<i>The Last Days of St. Peter.</i>	
Not found in Israel	208	St. Peter's last sermon	231
The Centurion at our Lord's feet	209	His return from the Transfiguration	232
Prophecy of our Lord	210	Incident of a raising from the dead	233
The law of substitution	211	Miracles of the Prophets	234
'Weeping and gnashing of teeth'	212	Selection of the circumstances of the miracle	235
The Gentiles and the Kingdom	213	Scene at Naim	236
The two accounts of the incident	214	Multitudes present	237
Tradition about the Centurion	215	'Weep not'	238
'Domine, non sum dignus'.	216	'I say to thee, Arise!'	239
CHAPTER XI.		'He gave him to his mother'	240
<i>Our Lord's Brethren.</i>		Remembrance of our Blessed Lady	241
St. Mark iii. 20—21; <i>Vita Vitæ Nostræ</i> , § 51.	2	Elias and Eliseus	242
Incident about our Lord's family	218	Mystical meaning of the miracle	243
The 'Brethren'	219	Result of the miracle	244
Their deep natural affection for Him	220	The great prophet	245
Their position with the people	221	The tidings widely spread	246

	PAGE
The Father's Providence	248
Arrangement of evidences	249
St. John and the 'works of Christ'	253
Message of St. John	252
The evidence of miracles	253
Our Lord's answer	254
Miracles	254
Reference to prophecy	255
Words of Isaias	256
'He that is to come'	257
System of our Lord	258
The Gospel preached to the poor	259
Danger of taking scandal	260
CHAPTER XIV.	
<i>Our Lord's witness to St. John Baptist.</i>	
St. Matt. xi. 7—19; St. Luke vii. 24, 25; <i>Vita Vitæ Nostræ</i> , § 53.	
Return of St. John's disciples	262
Our Lord witnessing to St. John	263
Another reason sometimes given	264
'What went ye out to see?'	265
Eulogy on St. John	266
His prerogatives	267
St. John the subject of prophecy	268
Special object of his mission	268
The children of women	269
The lesser in the Kingdom of Heaven	270
Greatness of the Gospel Kingdom	271
The preaching of the Kingdom	273
The Kingdom of Heaven suffering violence	274
The Prophets and the Law	275
'Elias that is to come'	276
Fulfilment of prophecy in St. John	277
CHAPTER XV.	
<i>The Children in the Market-Place.</i>	
St. Matt. xi. 15—19; St. Luke vii. 29, 30; <i>Vita Vitæ Nostræ</i> , § 53.	
'The children in the market-place'	282
Meaning of the image	283
Interpretation of Theophylact	284
St. John and our Lord	285
Both objected to	286
Means chosen by God	287
The Church following our Lord	288
Contradictory fault-finding	289
Concluding words of our Lord	290
Wisdom justified by her children	291
CHAPTER XVI.	
<i>Corozain and Bethsaida.</i>	
St. Matt. xi. 20—24; <i>Vita Vitæ Nostræ</i> , § 54.	
Cities in which our Lord had preached	293
Revelation of men's thoughts	294
No mention of our Lord's teaching in Corozain or Bethsaida	295
Great responsibilities of those who receive Divine blessings	296
Tyre and Sidon	297
Capharnaum and Sodom	297
Sins of the intelligence	298
Transient privileges of these cities	299
Immense value of grace	300

CHAPTER XVII.	PAGE	CHAPTER XIX.	PAGE
<i>Rejoicing of the Sacred Heart.</i>		<i>The Coming of Magdalene.</i>	
St. Matt. xi. 22—30; <i>Vita Vitæ Nostræ</i> , § 54.		St. Luke vi. 36—50; <i>Vita Vitæ Nostræ</i> , § 55.	
Our Lord rejoicing	301	Hard doctrines	326
Place of this incident	302	Consciousness of sin	327
St. Matthew and St. Luke	303	Witness of the enemies of the faith	327
Words of our Lord	304	Burthen of undiscovered crime .	328
God called His Father	304	Physical evils of life	329
Lord of Heaven and Earth	305	Miseries caused by man	330
Hiding and revealing	305	Light the beginning of relief .	331
The Scribes and Pharisees	306	How our Lord relieves these burthens	331
Senses of the words	306	Intellectual troubles—by faith .	332
Justice and Mercy	307	'Come to Me'—'Learn of Me'	333
Vindication of our Lord's honour	308	Two interpretations	334
The Father's will	309	The commandments in the Psalms	335
Providence an exercise of will .	310	Our Lord's own Presence .	336
All things delivered to our Lord .	311	Rest and refreshment .	337
He is made the Saviour	312	Light yoke on the intelligence .	337
His submission to His Father's will	312	Easiness of 'new' doctrines .	337
Knowledge of the Father and the Son	313	System of doctrines	338
The Father made known by the Son	314	Accumulation of evidence .	339
The passage continuous	315	Moral obligation	339
Necessity of self-knowledge	316	Satisfaction of conscience .	340
Contrast between the two dis- pensations	317	Help of a perfect example .	341
 CHAPTER XVIII.		New light shed on virtue .	342
<i>Sweetness of our Lord's yoke.</i>		Immense forces added .	343
St. Matt. xi. 28—30; <i>Vita Vitæ Nostræ</i> , § 54.		The old yoke and the new .	343
Those who labour and are burthened	319	External obligations	344
Passage in Ecclesiasticus	320	New obligations—confession of sins	344
Anxiëties of life	321	Advantages of confession in itself	345
Corporal miseries	321	Unity and indissolubility of marriage	346
Intellectual miseries	322	Connection of laws with sacraments	347
Mischief of opposition to the Church	323	 CHAPTER XIX.	
Mental and moral slavery	324	<i>The Coming of Magdalene.</i>	
Heathenism and imperfect forms of Christianity	325	Order of events	348
		Beautiful correspondence be- tween St. Matthew and St. Luke	349

PAGE	PAGE		
Scene of incident	350	Our Lord defending the attacked	382
Former history of Magdalene	351	Courtesy of His words to Simon	383
Deliverance from seven devils	352		
She was now a penitent	353		
Contemplation of her con- version	353		
She was a lonely soul	354		
Her gratitude to our Lord	355		
She came simply as a sinner	356		
Opinions as to her sins	357		
Probable conclusion	358		
Her entrance	358		
Appropriateness of her action	359		
The washing and anointing	360		
Thoughts of those present	361		
Simon the Pharisee	361		
What passed in his mind	362		
CHAPTER XXI.			
<i>The first work of Magdalene.</i>			
St. Luke viii. 1—3; <i>Vita Vitæ Nostræ</i> , § 55.			
Magdalene and her com- panions	384		
Reasons for the organization	385		
The ladies waiting on our Lord	386		
Their other occupations	387		
Examples in the life of the Apostles	388		
Conduct of St. Paul	389		
Another stage in the life of Magdalene	390		
Her work a continuation of the anointing	390		
Example followed in all ages	391		
APPENDIX.			
<i>Harmony of the Gospels.</i>			
§ 46. Choice of the Twelve Apostles	392		
§ 47. The Sermon on the Plain (Part the First)	392		
§ 48. The Sermon on the Plain (Part the Second)	393		
§ 49. The Sermon on the Plain (Part the Third)	394		
§ 50. The Centurion's servant	395		
§ 51. The Widow's son raised	396		
§ 52. The disciples of St. John sent to our Lord	396		
§ 53. Our Lord's last witness to St. John	397		
§ 54. The proud condemned and the humble chosen	399		
§ 55. Mary Magdalene comes to our Lord	399		

CHAPTER I.

The Choosing of the Apostles.

St. Mark iii. 13—19 ; St. Luke vi. 12—16 ; *Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 46.

THE period of our Lord's preaching at which we have now arrived, was marked by many external features which might have appeared discouraging in the highest degree to many who were disposed to befriend the new Kingdom. It was now certain that, unless some sudden and entire change came over the minds of the ruling class among the Jews, our Lord and His religion would find no considerable favour at their hands. Twice had He presented Himself at Jerusalem, on two successive feasts of the Pasch, to claim, as it might have seemed, the allegiance and the adhesion of the chief priests and learned men of the nation. On each of these occasions He had displayed His miraculous powers in great and striking abundance, as the Divine warrant for the mission which He had received. On the second occasion, indeed, He had done more than this. If His miracles were, on that second feast, less numerous than on the former, He had come to Jerusalem with the reports of His mighty deeds, wrought during the past year in Galilee, ringing in the air. It was impossible that a sensation like that which He had produced in that distant, but most important, province, should not be communicated by the Galilean worshippers to the rest of the people. But our Lord had gone beyond that silent demonstration of His Divine mission which was contained in His miracles.

He had chosen to work a miracle in such a manner as to draw the attention of the authorities to the powers which He exercised, and He had used the attention which He had thus aroused, for the purpose of laying before the highest ecclesiastical personages themselves a long and deeply reasoned statement of the various methods employed by the Providence of His Divine Father to point Him out as One invested with a Divine mission. One after another He had laid before them, in the great discourse of which St. John has given us a summary, the links of that mighty chain of testimonies which the loving Providence of God had woven for the sake of winning to Him their faith and obedience.

This time again, as the year before, the issue had been most discouraging. The conversion of the Jewish authorities seemed more and more impossible. On the first occasion of His appearance at Jerusalem, it had been a part of the Divine counsel that our Lord should startle them, if not, as is very probable, wound them in their material interests, by His severe purgation of the Temple of His Father from the traffic which they encouraged and profited by. On the second of the Paschs included in the four years of His Ministry, He divulged His right not simply to cleanse the Temple from its abuses, but to exercise the supreme authority which belonged to Him as the Son of Man, the Incarnate God, as the Lord of the Sabbath-day. Nothing more was required to make them His enemies. They fastened on this action of our Lord's, and on the occasion which it afforded them, of resting their jealous opposition to Him on His supposed violation of the most religious traditions of the holy nation. A second time our Lord was compelled, by His own gentle consideration for hearts which might have become still harder by His presence amongst them, to retire from Jerusalem and its neighbourhood, not simply

rejected by its rulers, but even an object of hatred and persecution at their hands. Other miracles had followed, which furnished the same pretext to their animosity. The end had been His retirement to a great extent from the public eye, at least in the greater towns which had become familiarized with His presence, and in which so many of His most famous miracles had been wrought. His enemies, divided as they were among themselves in their policy, their aims, their religious opinions and professions, still found, in their common hatred of our Lord, a bond of union which for the moment brought them together. The strictest devotees of the Law and the licentious politicians of the Court of Herod were thus linked together in an unholy alliance, the measures of which wore a moral aspect, combining the worst features of each of these combined parties. The result of the coalition, as it would now be termed, was the determination to bring about nothing less than the death of our Lord.

The line of conduct adopted by our Lord in consequence of the opposition thus created to His teaching by the malice of the Jewish authorities, and their league with the party of Herod, is dwelt upon by the first Evangelist in his characteristic manner. All through his Gospel, and especially in its earlier portions, St. Matthew is constantly presenting to us, one after another, the fulfilments of prophecy which he had observed in our Lord's life and history. These fulfilments are often, as in the case now before us, not so much correspondences consisting in single facts, such as the birth of our Lord at Bethlehem, or His conception of a pure Virgin, as general characteristics, which might be gathered from the prophecies concerning the Messias, such as, perhaps, the prediction that He should be called a Nazarene,¹

¹ St. Matt. ii. 23.

or that which fixed on Galilee as the first scene of His preaching.² On more than one occasion, as in the synagogue at Nazareth at the opening of His preaching, and again, on the occasion of the mission to Him of the disciples of St. John Baptist, our Lord Himself used this kind of general correspondence between the prophecies and His own mission, as an argument for the Divinity of that mission. In the present case, it is the gentle retiring, condescending character of the Servant of God, as traced in the prophecy of Isaias, and especially His tender consideration for the weaknesses of souls, as represented in the images of the bruised reed and the smoking flax, on which St. Matthew fastens. Something has been said of this in the preceding volume, and we may feel certain that a characteristic which finds special mention in the first Gospel was a feature in our Lord's method and conduct on which the early Christian teachers would insist, both in the Church of Jerusalem and elsewhere, wherever the Evangelical teaching was addressed to audiences consisting in the main of Jews or others familiar with the Scriptures. One of the great difficulties of such hearers would certainly be the apparent failure of our Lord with the holy nation, the weakness and obscurity which had marked His coming, and the manner in which the powers which were so mightily and so freely exercised in miracles of mercy, seemed to shrink to nothing when there was an occasion of their use in a manner which might have struck terror into His enemies, and carried Him by force, and against the utmost resistance that could be opposed to Him, to the throne of His Father David. As we find in the Gospel history that even the Apostles thought at times that it might be well to call down fire from heaven, merely to punish a town which would not give Him and them hos-

² St. Matt. iv. 14, 15.

pitality, the thoughts of many among the earliest listeners to the Gospel teaching may well have been kindred to those of the Sons of Thunder.

This line of conduct, moreover, was strictly in keeping with the direct precept of our Lord as given, a little later than this, to His Apostles, and through His Apostles, to the Church of all ages. He was to enjoin on them that, when persecuted in one city, they were to fly to another, rather than remain and fight out the battle against persecution at the cost and risk of their lives. It would not be only that their lives were in danger in such cases, but that the work which they had to do did not admit of delay, their time was immensely precious, and was not to be wasted on populations whose hearts were hardened against them. No doubt a minister of the Gospel fixed by authority in a certain place, is not to leave his post because the soil is ungrateful and hard to till. But the Apostolical office differs in this from that of the appointed shepherds of smaller flocks. The reception of the message of the Gospel requires willing hearts, and its chances are sometimes even delayed by the persistent forcing of the truth on those who are steeled against it. And, above all, the time for this ministry is short, and must be spent to the best advantage. Thus, in this case also, our Lord began, to use the language of St. Luke, to do before He began to teach. His teaching by example went before His teaching by word of mouth, and both were to be the consolation of hundreds of Apostolic labourers in all ages. St. Paul may often have dwelt on this precept of our Lord, when he had to retire from city after city, in order not to irritate to the utmost the enmity of his Judaizing opponents, men who had inherited the spirit of these Pharisees and Herodians before whom our Lord withdrew into comparative privacy.

The whole history and attitude of these Jewish rulers,

whose hostility produced the change in our Lord's method on which we are now dwelling, has more than one aspect on which Christian thought may profitably dwell. Their line of conduct, as St. Luke tells us,³ was virtually determined, even before our Lord came to preach among them. It had been determined by their failure to understand and, consequently, to close with, the merciful overture of grace made to them in the ministry of St. John Baptist. From that moment, the Jewish nation began to divide itself into two great sections, the one of which was to submit to the Gospel Kingdom, while the other was to oppose that Kingdom to their uttermost. The rejection of our Lord's teaching was involved in the practical rejection of that of St. John. The acceptance of the preaching of penance involved the acceptance of the whole Gospel system to which that preaching was the Divinely ordained introduction. It seemed a matter of slight moment whether the Jewish priests and rulers went out or not to be baptized in the Jordan, confessing their sins. This confession of sins and the baptism administered by St. John could not be considered, in a strict sense of the words, obligatory and necessary to salvation. They were obligatory and necessary in the sense that the acceptance of the good counsels, framed by God for the salvation of the world, or of individuals, are obligatory as a condition of that salvation. The obligation came from this, that it was in that manner that God, in His merciful wisdom, designed to bring men to the dispositions proper for the reception of the graces of the Gospel, and to assist them by His powerful aid, after these dispositions had been formed in them, to become docile disciples of the teaching of our Lord and His Apostles. In this way thousands of souls are continually lost, for not availung

³ St. Luke vii. 30.

themselves of the opportunities of grace which God in His Providence offers them, although it may be hard to say, as to any one particular opportunity, that it is in itself a mortal sin to turn away from it.

Moreover, the case of these men illustrates, with fearful clearness, another truth which belongs to the same subject, namely, the truth that men cannot remain neutral as to the acceptance of Divine favours, when they are largely offered, but are obliged, by an inevitable necessity, to take their part, either against these favours or for them, and, if not for them, then against them. Within a very short time those who had turned away from the austere preacher in the desert, who claimed to be nothing more than a voice, and a witness to Another, greater than himself, Who was to come immediately after him, found themselves under the necessity of rejecting the whole series of Divine evidences by which the mission of our Lord was attested. They found themselves forced to deny the most clear fulfilments of prophecy, and to refuse the witness of the most magnificent miracles. But this was as nothing to what soon followed. Their headlong course could not stop short till it had plunged them in the lowest depths. They were under the necessity of bringing about a judicial murder, which would have been a crime of the blackest atrocity, even if it had not been deicide itself, the murder of the Incarnate God. To bring about this murder, they were forced to stain their priestly and religious character by the bribery of a traitor, by the subornation of false witnesses, by using the most sacred forms of justice which the world had ever known, as the instruments of their malice and envy, by lying to the Roman Governor, by fawning upon the blood-stained and incestuous Herod, by canvassing the multitude to ask for the release of Barabbas, in order to prevent that of our Lord. And beyond this enormous heap of crime,

which they virtually drew on themselves, when they turned from our Lord at His first preaching in Jerusalem, there lay, in the not distant future, the reprobation of the holy nation which God had chosen out of all the races of men to make His own, the horrors of the final struggle for life with the armies of Rome, the destruction of their city and of the Temple of God, under circumstances of atrocity and calamity to which history can present no parallel, and the dispersion of the people over the whole face of the earth with a brand upon them like that of Cain. All these swift and unexampled chastisements were brought upon the nation by a few men who, perhaps, if they had lived but one generation earlier in the annals of the race, might have left behind them blameless names, even if they had not been reckoned among the lights of the Synagogue. At the outside, they were but the dominant class in a large community. Nowhere, in His dealings with men, has God so strongly marked the truth that, in His providential government of the world, He makes the lots of peoples and nations depend on the conduct of their rulers and responsible leaders, and that the national crimes of which the guilt thus rises up before Him are often made the occasions of the most terrible of all the exertions of His avenging justice.

And yet, like all the enemies of God in the history of the human race, these miserable men, Annas and Caiaphas and their associates, were but serving the Divine purposes while they were fighting against the Divine mercies. It was not in the counsels of Providence that the Church of Jesus Christ should grow by a seemingly natural process of development, out of the Mosaic system, as that system was visibly represented to the world by the hierarchy which ruled and the rites which prevailed at Jerusalem. The Gospel was to be the fulfilment of the Law, and not a jot or tittle even of the Levitical observances of the

Temple but corresponded to something in the Christian system into which these observances were to be transfigured. But still there was to be a breach of visible continuity between the Synagogue and the Church. Many Divine purposes were to be served by the absolute independence of the Church from the Synagogue. We see the influence of this Providential design in our Lord's own deliberate action with regard to many things which were dear to the most religious among the Jews, such as the enforcement of external austerities, fasting and the like, and notably, the manner in which the Sabbath was to be observed. Human prudence and policy might have counselled Him, at least to forbear from the public assertion of His rights as Lord of the Sabbath, and yet He did this apparently impolitic thing in the face of the authorities at Jerusalem on the occasion of a great public feast. He would not have His system a patchwork of old cloth and new, He would not pour the new wine of the Gospel into the old skins. We are not able to penetrate all the secrets of His Divine wisdom and prudence in this line of action. But we can at least see, looking no further in the history of the Church than those few years, the events of which fill the Acts of the Apostles, that the Jewish element in the Christian community might have been strengthened in a manner which would have made the work of St. Peter and St. Paul, in the admission of the Gentiles and the establishment of their absolute liberty from the Old Law, difficult indeed, if the chief priests and rulers of Jerusalem had flocked into the Church instead of being her bitterest persecutors.

To the outward eye, therefore, and to the outward eye alone, was the enforced retirement of our Lord before His enemies any indication of true defeat. Defeat indeed, and the most ignominious of deaths, were to be His lot at the hands of these His enemies, who were to seem

to triumph at the very moment when they were bringing about His greatest elevation and the consummation of the work which He had come into the world to do. And, no doubt, Satan and his evil angels had rejoiced in our Lord's rejection by the ecclesiastical rulers, even before it had led to any results greater than the cessation of His public preaching in many of the places where He had been most successful, and where large masses of the people had become devoted to Him. This retirement of our Lord involved a silencing, in many centres of life and thought, of the voice of Him Who spoke as never man spake. It involved a stoppage of the stream of conversions, it left men in darkness and the shadow of death as to their moral state, the glorious light no longer shone, the chains of sin remained riveted where they might have been loosened, and it was a gain to the enemies of the human race that the series of marvellous miracles of mercy should pause, and that their own possession of human souls and bodies should in so many cases be left undisturbed. Many a seed, already sown, would wither away from want of watering, many another would be choked by worldly cares as by thorns, and the fowls of the air, as our Lord described them, would be free to snatch away many more seeds before they had been assimilated to the soil on which they had fallen. The 'lesser glory of God' is almost as dear to Satan as the accomplishment of his own schemes of actual dishonour to God. But God has many ways of compensating Himself when He seems to be thwarted, and of carrying out His own designs by means of the very measures which His enemies invent for His defeat.

In the present case, the retirement of our Lord was used by Him as the best possible opportunity for the carrying out the work of the foundation of the Church. Just as He had spent so many years in the utmost fruit-

fulness of work in the sight of Heaven, while He seemed outwardly to be doing almost nothing at Nazareth, in building up by constant intercourse and tenderest communion with Mary and Joseph the stupendous sanctity which, after His own most perfect obedience, was to furnish the greatest earthly glory to His Father, so now He was laying deep the foundations of the Church in the training of His Apostles, Peter and John and the rest, for the lofty office for which He intended them. It is quite easy to see that, whatever might have been the effect on the people at large, if the new Kingdom had been welcomed with joy by the rulers of Jerusalem, if the Temple had been surrendered, so to speak, to its rightful Lord, and if the sons of Aaron and Levi had thrown themselves in homage at His feet, at least the formation of the future Apostles required the sharp air of adversity, of hardship, of persecution, of dangers of every sort, if they were to be fitted thereby for their work in the world. According to the great laws which rule the spiritual kingdom, it would be as strange and abnormal a thing to attempt to form the novices of a religious order under a system from which all exercises and opportunities of humiliation and self-conquest were carefully excluded, as to endeavour to train Apostles in the midst of the applause and admiration of the world. The time in our Lord's life with which we are now dealing was, in a certain most true sense, the novitiate of the Apostles, and the circumstances under which they had now to follow Him, in humiliation and hardship and danger, were just those chosen by God as most fitted for the work which our Lord had now in hand. Thus it is that we come to see, in this arrangement also, the beautiful order in which all the successive periods of our Lord's life were marshalled, and we understand how it was that the formal vocation of the Twelve to the Apostolate took place, just at the

time when our Lord seemed driven, by the malice of His enemies, to abandon some considerable part of the field in which He had hitherto laboured in Galilee.

We have two accounts in the Gospels of the formation of the Apostolic body. St. Mark dwells on the absolute authority exercised by our Lord in the choice which He now made. ‘Going up into a mountain, He called unto Him whom He would Himself, and they came to Him.’ St. Luke, in his usual manner, points to the preparation made by our Lord for this solemn selection. ‘It came to pass in these days, that He went up into a mountain to pray, and He passed the whole night in the prayer of God.’ It cannot be doubted that our Lord usually spent the nights in prayer and communion with His Father, and thus the purpose of St. Luke must be not so much to notice any deviation in our Lord from His custom in this respect, as if it had been a singular thing for Him so to pass the night, as to direct attention to the solemnity and importance of the occasion which was ushered in by a special dedication by our Lord of the prayer of the night to one particular object. There are but few occasions on which this special mention is made, of our Lord passing the night in prayer, and it seems always intended that we should understand that what followed or preceded the prayer, was a matter of the greatest moment in His Kingdom.

Certainly, no step which our Lord had as yet taken could be considered as more momentous than this of the institution of the Apostolate. The action of our Lord of which we are now speaking, was nothing less than this in His own Sacred Heart, although it may be quite true to say that He did not at this moment unfold to the Apostles themselves the whole of their great commission, as it was afterwards made known to them before His Ascension, and that He did not at once endow them

with all the powers which that commission involved. We may say here a few words, by way of general explanation of the Apostolate as it is set before us in the theology of the Catholic Church, without implying that at this moment it was established formally as it was afterwards to exist. In the strictest sense, then, the Apostles were commissioned to be the preordained witnesses to the Resurrection of our Lord, the great fundamental truth of the Christian religion ; not that they were ocular witnesses of the Resurrection itself, but that they were such witnesses to the fact that He Whom they had known before was again alive after His Passion and Death. The Apostles were also the immediate recipients of the complete revelation from our Lord and the Holy Ghost. They were to be the original promulgators of this revelation, confirmed and inspired for this special purpose. They were to be the authentic witnesses of this revelation to the whole human race. This is the strictest sense of the Apostolate in Christian theology. But there is also a wider sense in which the Apostolate is the organ of the Church, by which she generates children, educates, nourishes, and rules them, by which also she witnesses to the Kingdom of Christ to all who are not her children.

From this it follows that in its strictest sense the Apostolate began and came to an end with the Apostles themselves. The Pope succeeds to the Primacy of St. Peter, but not to the personal Apostolate of St. Peter, and the Holy See is called the Apostolic See, because it possesses the plenitude of the Apostolate in its wider sense, or possibly because the other eleven Apostles were included in the Primacy of St. Peter. In the wider sense, the Apostolate continues in the Church. It exists in the Divinely-ordained Hierarchy, Bishops, Priests, and Ministers, and those belonging to this Hierarchy may,

with due restrictions, be called the successors of the Apostles, because they receive orders from them handed down by continual derivation from predecessors to successors. In the same wide sense again the Apostolate embraces the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy, that is, the Pope, Bishops Ordinary, and—in a certain sense—Parish Priests, but of these the only one who inherits his office or has it by succession is the Pope, the others receiving it by appointment. The Pope is said to have the Apostolate by inheritance, because the Primacy is immovably annexed to the See of Rome, and is numerically one from St. Peter. In all other cases the office is conferred and succeeded to.

After this statement of the theology of the Apostolate, it is easy to see that the whole office in its strictest sense was not now conferred by our Lord. The twelve were now designated and called, but it is after the Passion and Resurrection that it is natural to think that the full institution of this great commission took place. The Church, as the Spouse of Christ, was born, according to the contemplation of the Fathers, from His side on the Cross, as Eve was formed by God from the side of Adam as he slept. The Church, in this sense, was before any of its parts, at least in that formal order of existence which became its condition in the Kingdom of God. It is therefore only in the more general sense that we speak of the institution of the Apostolate in the present chapter.

The name of Apostle implies, in those to whom it is assigned by our Lord, a reflection and participation, in a certain degree, of His own Divine mission, an office which thus made them the founders and authors, with and through Him, of the Christian community, as well as the guides and pastors of its members. In another sense, again, the institution of the Apostolate was the beginning

of the formation of the community itself. It provided the body with a nucleus around which it might gather, and with rulers and leaders who were to wield in it the highest authority. It was possibly nothing strange or unheard of, among the teachers of the Jewish schools, to form around themselves a band of disciples. Every individual teaching has a tendency thus to collect a body in some informal manner, for it provides men of intelligence and thought with a new bond of union among themselves, in which others do not share. But the formation of the Apostolic body by our Lord was a great deal more than the collection of a band of disciples. It aimed directly at the carrying on, on a wider scale, of the work of preaching which He had, Himself begun, and from which it was the object of His enemies to make Him desist. It was a multiplication of preachers instead of the silencing of preaching. It aimed at the continuance of the separate existence of the school, which it was the object of the persecutors to disperse. It provided for the aggregation of new members, and for the development of the organization of which it was the germ. Thus while the Pharisees and Herodians were rejoicing, perhaps, over the success of their wishes, if not of their designs against His life, our Lord was planting a work which would survive their utmost efforts against Himself and spread His Name and His Kingdom over the whole world.

The history of the Christian Apostolate, in this widest sense, is the history of the Christian Church itself, and it would be unwise to linger at the present point of the story of our Lord's life in order to endeavour to trace all the glories which that history records. The Apostolate, in the more general and less technical sense of the word, as it has existed in the Church ever since that memorable morning on which our Lord 'called to Him whom He

would Himself,' has discharged very multifarious functions in the foundation, the expansion, the government, the renovation and the reinvigoration of the Church, and the instruments by which the work has been accomplished have been as many and as various as the character of the special needs and works themselves. In this respect it has shared, as nothing else has shared, in the universal mission and office of our Lord for the good of mankind and of the Church. It would be unreasonable to look for a definition or declaration of the whole range of the functions of the Apostolate at the first outset of its operations, though we cannot doubt that our Lord left behind Him, when He ascended into Heaven, for this as for all other parts of His Divine Kingdom, a clearly-defined and perfectly-organized system for His Apostles to carry out. But we can still see in the few words in which the institution is related by the Evangelists, a description which embraces, with great accuracy and even with great fulness, the principles and the essence of this great gift of God to men.

The Evangelists seem to tell us that our Lord passed the night in prayer alone, and apart from His disciples. Then 'When the day was come,' says St. Luke, 'He called unto Him His disciples.' 'He called unto Him,' as we have quoted from St. Mark, 'whom He would Himself, and they came unto Him.' Thus we seem to have a picture of the whole incident. Our Lord retires for the night, even from the company of His most intimate companions, and spends the long dark hours on the mountain alone, in close communion with His Eternal Father. The whole plan and scope of the institution He was about to found is laid before the Father in prayer, and the mighty and efficacious intercession of the Incarnate Son spends its strength, hour after hour, in imploring the wonderful graces, flowing

from His own Person, necessary for the continuance of His own work in the world, for the Apostles, and all their successors to the end of time, in whatever part of the Apostolate. What thousands of souls were in His Heart, as He looked along the Christian centuries, of those who were to be the workers in this mighty army, and of those whose salvation and perfection were to be secured by this invention of love ! The dignity of the office, the marvellous grace committed, as St. Paul says, to earthen vessels, the trials and anxieties and weaknesses and dangers of the vocation, as they are so often described by the same great Saint, were all in our Lord's Heart at that time, and He looked on to the end of the Church, as well as to the earlier ages, when the first or second generation of successors came to inherit the work of those whom He was now to call. Alas ! even in that first band there was to be a traitor, and his defection was to be the type of many a similar falling away in after times. But there were Peter and James and John and Andrew, and in the near distance the glorious figure of St. Paul was to rise up, to console the Saviour of the world for a thousand failures of grace. But we must not attempt to enter into the sanctuary of the Sacred Heart. When the day dawned, our Lord was still alone on the mountain, and the loving hearts below were soon looking anxiously for His descent, to begin again the lessons of mercy and love with which they were now familiar. But the first thing He did after coming down from the mountain, with the dews of night on His raiment, and His frame worn with the exertion of ardent supplication, was to call together the larger body of the disciples, which still accompanied Him. Then, in the presence of all, He called the twelve, one after another, to receive their new office. Thus the body of the Apostles was formed, in some measure, publicly—it was not simply that one

after another received from our Lord some private intimation of His will concerning him. In this way they came to be invested at once with a kind of undefined authority, such as we find recognized by the general crowd of the faithful, after the Ascension of our Lord.

It must have been partly this more solemn and public association with Himself, which constituted the special call of the Apostles of which the Evangelists here tell us. We know of most of them already, that they must have been, for several months at least, the almost inseparable companions of our Lord. More than once they had heard from His lips the loving invitation, ‘Follow Me,’ but it had not been an invitation to so final an abandonment of everything, nor to so complete and definite a union of their lives with His, as that which was now their call. If it had been only, however, to a closer companionship with Him than that they had before enjoyed, it is likely that the call now given would not have been so public and solemn. Some relation to the general body of the disciples, raising them to some authority, seems implied in this publicity. And like all other calls in the Kingdom of our Lord, whether public or secret, whether to a temporary office and duty, or to functions which remained unchanged during life, the call of our Lord was one which involved an obligation of obedience, a demand on personal loyalty which could not be neglected without risk, even if it might be disregarded without formal sin, and which also conveyed the graces necessary and opportune for the due discharge of their new functions. But the words of the Evangelists imply the absolute independence of our Lord in making this free choice, and that the invitation was to an office which could not be earned, or bought, or obtained by favour, or intercession. No one could complain if it were not

given him, no one who had received it could consider himself free concerning it, as though it were altogether his own to follow or not to follow.

CHAPTER II.

First Outlines of the Apostolate.

St. Mark iii. 13—19 ; St. Luke vi. 12—16 ; *Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 46.

THE words of the Evangelists, describing our Lord's purpose in this selection of the twelve, are, as has been already said, sufficient for us to feed on in meditation, and to furnish us with the great features and characteristics of the Apostolic office, at least at this time. St. Mark mentions four distinct purposes for which the selection was made. In the first place he tells us that our Lord 'made twelve that they should be with Him.' In the second place he says, 'and that He might send them out to preach.' In the third place, he adds that 'He gave them power to heal sicknesses,' and adds, in the last place, that this power also extended to the casting out of devils. Thus there are four characteristics of the Apostolic office, as it was exercised by the twelve at this period. They were to be constantly with our Lord, their union with Him was now of the closest and most permanent kind. They were to be sent out to preach, and at such times, though outwardly separated from Him, they were to maintain the most perfect spiritual union with Him, and their preaching was to be, above all things, an extension and continuation of His preaching. Out of the wondrous array of the powers inherent in His own Sacred Person, He communicated two to them for the purpose, among others, of making their preaching more

authoritative, and so more like His own. They were armed with powers over diseases and over devils, power therefore, against the physical evils and miseries of human life, and also against the spiritual foes of God and man, in their assaults on and cruel tyranny over mankind.

It is clear, as has been said, that the first of these characteristic features in the Apostolate which our Lord had in view when He called the twelve at this time, must have been a great advance on any familiarity, or friendship, or intimacy, which the Apostles had enjoyed up to the time of their call. And yet, in the order of friendship and companionship, there might seem to have been few higher privileges to be accorded to them than those which they already enjoyed. For many months, most of them had been with Him. There seems good reason for thinking that, with the single and significant exception of St. Peter, the lists of the Apostles, as given us in the several Evangelists, represent to us, with little variation, the order of time according to which they had become our Lord's companions. St. Peter is always put first in the catalogue, and by St. Matthew he is especially designated as 'the first,'¹ though we know that he was brought to our Lord by his own brother St. Andrew, who was one of the two first of the disciples of St. John Baptist to join our Lord after His temptation. In that same passage of St. John's Gospel, two more, St. Philip and St. Nathanael, or Bartholomew, are mentioned by name as having been called, or brought to our Lord, while another, unnamed, is mentioned as St. Andrew's companion, in whom it is natural to see St. John himself, who may be supposed to have introduced his own brother, St. James. These two are at all events mentioned very soon after this as called by our

¹ St. Matt. x. 2.

Lord from their nets along with St. Peter and St. Andrew. Thus we have accounts of the several vocations, or first calls, on the part of our Lord, of all the Apostles in the list till we come to the name of St. Matthew, and we know, from the Gospels, the point of the history at which he received the gracious invitation which filled him with so much delight. St. Thomas seems to have been called about the same time, and St. Matthew seems to rejoice to put his own name after that of St. Thomas. Of the four whose names come last in the list, three are taken from among the near relatives of our Lord Himself, and must probably have known Him as a boy or youth. The last name is that of the unhappy Judas Iscariot, and it may be supposed that he was the last in order of time to join our Lord and His disciple. If he did this later than St. Thomas and St. Matthew, it may not have been at any considerable distance of time before the selection of the Apostles as such.

As it is thus nearly certain that the twelve Apostles were already most close companions of our Lord, it is natural that Christian contemplation should have sought for further kinds of union and intimate relations with Him, in order to explain the new position in which they were now placed. Their number and their separation from the rest of the body of the disciples, together with some hints which may be discerned in the Gospel narrative itself, have suggested to many minds the idea, which has considerable confirmation in the traditions of the Church, that the Apostles now became a more or less organized religious community under the Headship of our Lord. We have thus in them the germ and beginning of the religious life, although the characteristics of our Lord's work must of necessity have precluded that cloistered retirement and regularity of daily rule which is commonly connected with our ideas of

religious communities. There are traces of the vows of poverty and obedience, for our Lord certainly addresses them, almost immediately after their election, as actually poor, instead of as poor in spirit, when it would have been natural for Him, on many grounds, to have repeated the Beatitude of poverty in the same words as in the Sermon on the Mount. Even in the scanty notices which remain to us, there are some traces of the organization of the body under our Lord. Such bodies usually require one who is to take charge of the money of the community, one who is to look after the temporal provision for sustenance, one who is to take the command temporarily, in the occasional absence of the superior, and another who may be the general receiver of strangers or of communications from without. It may seem fanciful to pretend to discover, in the short notices in the Gospel from which alone we have to draw conclusions in this matter, any sufficient indications of arrangements of this kind.

We have, however, some few hints. It is not easy to suppose that there was no sort of organization in this little company, especially as we know that Judas had an office, that of keeping the money offered to our Lord as alms, and the kindred duty of giving to the poor, and of purchasing whatever might be wanted on occasions such as that of the celebration of the Paschal Supper. Although St. Peter is always put first in the list of Apostles, and although he speaks in the name of the body when our Lord asks them the famous question as to Who He was thought to be by men in general, and then by themselves, yet his office hardly seems to have been that which we should now call the office of superior under our Lord. When our Lord is absent from the main body of the twelve, though He usually takes three with Him, Peter and James and John, St. Andrew is left

with the rest, although his age and the early date of his call to our Lord's companionship might seem to give him a place with those favoured three. This may perhaps imply that he was left, as it were, as leader of the eight on those occasions, as when our Lord raised the daughter of Jairus to life, again, as at the Transfiguration, and the prayer of our Lord in the inner Garden of Gethsemani. When there was no withdrawal from the main body, as on the occasion of the last prophecy on Mount Olivet, St. Andrew is mentioned as joining the other three in their request to our Lord.² On two occasions St. Philip is named as if he had some special charge. These occasions are, that of the feeding of the five thousand, when our Lord speaks to him as if it were his business to see to the stock of provisions, 'Whence shall we find bread for these to eat?'³ and then it is Andrew who intervenes, after Philip has declared that two hundred pennyworth of bread would not be enough, to say that 'there is a lad who has five loaves and a few fishes.' The other occasion is that on which the Gentiles wish to see our Lord, just after the procession of palms, as it appears, and these men apply to Philip, who goes to Andrew, and then the two together ask our Lord how it is to be.⁴ These are very faint indications, it is true, as to the interior arrangements of the community which our Lord is supposed to have formed, but they do not seem to be altogether accidental.

A more important feature in this new companionship with our Lord to which the twelve were now admitted, is that which rises to the mind, when we consider that it involved, almost of necessity, the closest possible intimacy between the Master and His disciples one by one. Something has already been said as to the external trials, to which the members of this little body

² St. Mark xiii.³ St. John vi. 5—8.⁴ St. John xii. 22.

must have been exposed. If the Son of Man ordinarily had no where to lay His head, there must have been frequent difficulties as to the feeding and lodging of the body who now constantly accompanied Him. These trials have been compared to the exercises of mortification, humility, and labour in which the novices of a religious order are trained, and which form indeed so large and so essential a part in their training. But the value and charm of such a training would be very imperfectly estimated, if it were supposed to begin and to end in these exercises of mortification and humiliation, or in anything at all of a merely external character. The life and spring of the whole of such a system consists in the personal care and guidance, exercised by the masters of the spiritual life over the souls committed to their charge. This care must be individual, even more than general. In the famous system of the kind in the early Church, that of the Fathers of the Desert, as we call them, it seems to have been the custom for each beginner to be put under the charge of some one old and experienced recluse, from whom he learnt the whole method of life of the general body, and under whose individual guidance his soul was to ripen and grow up in the practice of every perfection. This individual union and charge became impossible as time went on, and the system was gradually, if not at a very early time, modified by the appointment of a single master to train a number of beginners together. But in any case, the intimate personal cultivation of the soul remained the essence of the spiritual system, and the master dealt, as well with each one by himself, as with all together. We may certainly understand the words of the Evangelist as implying this, in the case of the relations of the Apostles to our Lord in their new mode of life. He Himself afterwards said, speaking in a more general sense,

that He knew His sheep and His sheep knew Him. He used that beautiful image, of the perpetual truth of which travellers in Eastern countries assure us, ‘The sheep know His voice, and He calleth His own sheep by name, and leadeth them out, and when He hath led out His own sheep, He goes before them, and the sheep follow Him, because they know His voice, but a stranger they follow not, but fly from him, because they know not the voice of strangers.’⁵ We may be sure that the words, which seem to refer to a subject very familiar to our Blessed Lord’s Heart, must have had something to correspond to them in His own personal experience. They represent the sheep of the Good Shepherd, not so much as a flock and nothing more, but rather as a collection of individual sheep, each one of whom was known intimately and separately to their Master. But we can imagine no class of those with whom our Lord had to deal, to whom they more fittingly be applied than the Apostles. They, if any, were His sheep, who knew His voice and were known to Him, one by one.

We thus seem to have authority for the belief, which is indeed only the natural result of reflection on the subject, that from this time forward, the Apostles received a greater amount of personal cultivation and attention from our Lord than before, that they were accustomed to that which is the natural correlative of such cultivation, namely, to open themselves without reserve and with the most childlike freedom to Him, that He dealt with them one by one, according to the infinite wisdom and tenderness which were in Him, and that, in consequence, in the case of all except that one poor soul, on whom all His cares were to be thrown away, the union between Him and them was indefinitely deepened and strengthened. From this time they had

a share in His thoughts and counsels, as far as they were capable of such confidence, and in their relations to Him, they became more like the inmates of that most blessed home, in which He had dwelt for so many years, with His Mother and St. Joseph, than the cherished and trusted friends which they had been to Him before.

This thought opens to us many subjects for reflection which may help to enhance our ideas concerning the dignity and privileges of the Apostles, and so to understand better the Gospel narratives concerning them. These narratives are drawn up, either by themselves or under their direction, and they do not omit, we may be sure, any point that might serve for the instruction of the faithful, even at the expense of laying bare the failings of the first followers of our Lord. But they do not dwell on their virtues or services to Him, and we are left to gather their immense personal privileges from the simple facts which are passed over without comment. It seems to be the case that, in the spiritual kingdom, the differences, between one degree of union and another, become greater and more wonderful as the soul rises in the scale, and it may require a very great familiarity with our Lord and with Divine things to understand all that may have been involved in this ever increasing nearness to the Sacred Heart of our Lord which was now opened to the Apostles. The lives and writings of the Saints, especially those whose intimate communings with our Lord we know the most of, must at least be deeply studied in order that we may come to comprehend faintly what this ‘being with Him’ may have implied in the case of souls like those of Peter or John, James or Andrew. The whole realm, so to speak, of our Lord’s spiritual dealings with single souls, one of the most beautiful and magnificent portions of His Kingdom, is reserved for our contemplation in the blessed light of

His face in Heaven. We only know that, as He is so wonderful in all things, and as He shows the infinite condescension of His tenderness and wisdom, even in what we can discover of His workings in the lower grades of the physical creation, so He must indeed be surpassingly wonderful in His personal care of souls, and more especially of those on whom He lavishes love and care such as are given to few. Nothing that science can reveal to us of the delicate and minute care which is shown for even the lower order of God's creatures, in His arrangements concerning them, can be more than the faintest shadow of the exquisite devices of His wisdom and love which are set in play for the relief, the support, the consolation, the illumination, the upward guidance, of the souls on whom the Good Shepherd pours forth all the treasures of His affection.

As the riches which our Lord has to bestow are infinite, and as the actual bestowal of them is only limited by the capacity and the faithfulness of the souls whom He desires to enrich, it must be certain that the treasures of grace which were now laid open to these chosen children of His love were practically boundless, and we may feel certain that their advance and profit in spiritual strength and stature, must have been from this time forth immense. We have hitherto been mainly concerned with the communications which must have passed between our Lord and each one of the body individually, and it may be imagined that these personal communications were the most prolific and powerful source of spiritual blessings to them. But it must not be forgotten that their simple companionship with our Lord and, under Him, with one another, could not but be of immense benefit to them, even apart from His private dealings with them one by one. It is the privilege of saintly souls who are closely united to Him, to profit,

not only by the blessings which they have as their own secret treasure, and which are not shared with them by the world at large, but also, in an eminent degree, by the commoner benefits which are open to all. Thus the Saints of God, in all ages, have advanced like giants in the way of perfection, not only by the peculiar favours which they may have received in prayer, but also, and even more, by their participation in the ordinary means of grace, the sacraments, the Word of God, and the like. In the case of the Apostles, the constant companionship with our Lord, which now became their normal lot, implied a familiarity with His example, His methods of acting, His practice of all the virtues in relation to God and to man, His charity, His humility, His zeal, His mercy, His love for enemies, and the like, such as belonged to no one but themselves. It involved the constant illumination of their minds by His conversation and teaching, and an insight into the principles and maxims by which His Kingdom was to be governed. The more the persecution and proscription to which He was now subjected threw Him back into privacy, the more continual were the opportunities enjoyed by those who shared this privacy. It was not exactly the loss of the many that became the gain of the few, because these spiritual opportunities were laid open to the Apostles not for themselves alone, but that they might become the more efficient ambassadors and delegates for the salvation of the many. The whole world gained by this intimate training of the Apostles, as it had gained by the thirty years of the Hidden Life, as it gains now, whenever a chosen soul is magnificently enriched by our Lord, though it be, perhaps, in some hidden cottage, or cave, or in some remote cloister, with spiritual favours and graces of the same order as those which He lavished on Ignatius or Teresa.

This consideration of the intimate care expended by our Blessed Lord on the individual souls of the twelve Apostles is very precious to us on another account. It sets Him before us as the first great spiritual Director in the Kingdom of His Father. It thus enables us to connect with His own practice and example the most important and delicate exercise of that fatherly care over souls which He has delegated to His priests, whether we are ourselves the subjects of guidance, or whether we are occupied in the guidance of others. And indeed if the latter be our vocation, we must first pass through the state of pupilage in the former, and we must continue to be ourselves always under direction while we act to others in the office of directors. In all these cases it is an immense consolation to us to think of the time when our Lord placed Himself exactly in this relation to so many chosen souls. We may consider that the holy traditions and maxims by which those who have this office in the Church are guided in its discharge, are, in the main, reflections and inheritances from Him, and that He has sanctioned and blessed and made fruitful and prolific of endless good, this particular part, as all other parts, of the ministerial office. It is no argument on the other side to say, that we have no details of this guidance of our Lord over particular souls in the narratives of the Evangelists. The Gospels were not intended to furnish us with instructions of this kind, at least with any direct particulars of our Lord's practice in this respect. These things were, like so many others, the secret possession of the Apostles. A great part of that Divine illumination from the Holy Ghost, which made them so fully equal to the immense spiritual work laid upon them by their office, consisted in the revival in their minds of what our Lord had said to them. They were His scholars, formed and trained under His own eye

and hand. And even if they did not, in every particular case, remember how this or that detail of the science of the government of souls had been insisted on by our Lord in their own personal guidance, still, being His spiritual children, they were formed, unconsciously to themselves, to administer the same training and guidance to others on the same principles and by the same methods as His own.

We see in this, as in other instances, how great was the amount of what our Lord left behind Him in the hearts and minds of the Apostles, which might have passed away with them, unless it had been by them carefully enshrined in the floating traditions and methods of the Church. The ways of God with every single soul are very wonderful, and His whole system, so to call it, of the government of souls is not the least fair of all the beautiful departments of the spiritual Kingdom. The most wonderful part of this realm is naturally, as we may suppose, that which relates to His dealings with those souls on whom He has expended His choicest favours, and, among these, few could be reckoned so high as these holy Apostles. And yet all this part of our Lord's work is hidden, until the day comes when it shall be manifested in Heaven for the delight and instruction of the saints. It is with this, we may say, as with that part of His human conversation which would be unknown to us altogether, if we had not the Gospel of St. John, and as to which that Evangelist has only just lifted the veil and barely more. He has told us of disputation with the Jews, such as find no record in the other Gospels. He has told us also of dialogues with single persons, such as Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman, of which we should have no idea but for the short records with which he has furnished us. He has told us, above all, of the long discourse in which our Lord poured Himself forth

to His beloved friends after the institution of the Most Blessed Sacrament. All these are portions of the Life of our Lord, of which we know, as it is, very little, but of which we should know almost nothing at all but for the revelations made to us by the beloved Apostle. What would it have been, if it had so pleased God, if St. John or St. Peter or St. Thomas had left behind him a record of our Lord's intimate dealings with his own soul, and if we were able to compare His method with one with His method with another? The study of the Gospels reveals to us very great diversities of character among the twelve, and we cannot doubt that our Lord adapted His training to the peculiarities of each. We can form some idea of His method with St. Peter from the scanty records remaining to us, and perhaps we can see something of the extreme forbearance and charitable skill with which He managed the soul of Judas as far as that could be done without interfering with his liberty. But on the whole, all this great part of our Lord's doings in the foundation of the Church, remains hidden to us, as much as the labours after the Day of Pentecost of the greater number of the Apostles themselves, of which only the scantiest records remain in Christian tradition.

It must not, however, be thought that, because we have no details of the manner in which our Lord exercised in general the function of director and master on the spiritual life, and because we have so few direct statements as to what passed in general between Him and the twelve, therefore the fruit of all this most Heavenly intercourse has been lost to us. We cannot doubt for a moment that this communion with Him, in which the Apostles now so constantly lived, influenced to an indefinite extent the whole afterlife of the Christian community. Even to the outward eye, that looks on her from a purely critical point of view, there is a certain character belong-

ing to the Church as such, a certain temper and method and tone and way, which her children are too familiar with to recognise, because they take it for granted, as we take for granted the atmosphere in which we live. Even our peculiarities of national character, or the effects of climate, or family, or training in a particular school, and the like, are not discernible by ourselves, so much as by strangers. And yet no one can question the great power of such influences in the formation of a decided character. A great man, or an eminent artist or teacher, leaves the impression of his own character on those around him, and even in cases of no great pre-eminence of genius, the impression is perpetuated, thought it may gradually grow faint, in successive generations. Much more then must the character of our Lord, in all its ineffable force and depth and beauty and sweetness, have left a mark on all who came across Him, a mark deeper and more indelible on all who lived with Him. This was the very design of God in taking upon Him our nature. To say that something is characteristic of the Church, is the same thing as to say that something is characteristic of Him. The Apostles stamped themselves on the communities which they formed, and the mark which they left was the mark of our Lord. ‘Be you followers of me,’ says St. Paul, ‘as I also am of Christ.’⁶ He had not seen our Lord, at least he had not seen Him as His Disciple and Apostle before His Crucifixion and Ascension, but he had had that one incomunicable characteristic, as it seems, of the Apostolate imparted to him, as the rest of his knowledge of the Gospel was imparted to him, not by man, but by God. In others it was a necessity to have known our Lord ‘from the baptism of John until the day wherein He was taken away from them,’⁷ as St. Peter said on the occasion of the election of St. Mathias.

⁶ 1 Cor. iv. 16; xi. 1; Philipp. iii. 17.

⁷ Acts i. 22.

Simply to bear witness to the historical fact of the Resurrection of our Lord, was a formal part of the Apostolic office ; but for this, according to the ordinary laws of evidence, any certain knowledge of His Person, before and after His Resurrection, would have sufficed. But to stamp the mind and character of our Lord upon others it was necessary to have known Him very familiarly, unless the same power could be miraculously imparted, as in the case of St. Paul.

Some reference has already been made, in this work, to the practical instructions which form so considerable a part in the Epistles of the Apostles, those of St. Paul as well as of the others. We have here the very essence and flower of Christian morality, the principles and methods and rules of social and domestic life which were introduced by the Apostles wherever they went. Everywhere there is the same character of charity, of purity, of mercifulness, of gentleness and humility, of the most tender consideration for others. The joy also, which is another characteristic of the early Christians as they are painted for us, so to say, in these instructions of the first teachers, becomes easily intelligible when we consider what sort of a society that was which had thus been created and knitted closely together. But, at the same time, there is everywhere a tacit reference to the example and character of our Lord. He it is that is sketched for the imitation and delight of the faithful in the Epistles of the Apostles as well as in the Gospels. Surely it is here that we come upon the fruit of the constant companionship with Him, to which the Apostles were now called, and we have reason to see how true it is that His life is the foundation and root and spring of that of the whole Christian community in this sense also.

The same may be said of the working of the Holy Ghost in the hearts of the faithful, as that working is

indirectly manifested to us in the Sacred Scriptures, which are His work, and of which the writings of the Apostles form so principal a portion. It was to be the office of the Holy Ghost to receive what was our Lord's and show it to them,⁸ and to bring to their remembrance, as has been said, all things which He had said to them.⁹ These offices of the Holy Spirit were indeed fulfilled in other ways, as well as in this of which we are now speaking ; but they were fulfilled in this. When the Holy Ghost took possession of the hearts of the Christian people, and especially those who were in a peculiar manner near and dear to our Lord, His great work was to bring out in them the lines which had been drawn by Him, and to impress on others who had been strangers to Him that character which was His. In the case of the Apostles especially, but also of others who had caught the stamp from them, or from our Lord Himself, the Holy Ghost was to work very much through their memory, by bringing to their minds how He was wont to speak and to act and to behave, that thus they might repeat in their own lives and hand on to others after them the most precious of all the Divine traditions, the manner and principles of Jesus Christ.

It follows, as a spiritual necessity, that the love and devotion of the Apostles to our Blessed Lord must have increased daily in intensity and depth during all this period. No one could come near Him without being drawn to love Him, except in those terrible cases in which the human heart was resolutely set against Him by its own perversity, as in the Chief Priests, and in Judas, after his decline had begun. It is perhaps the greatest of all the marvels in the Life of our Lord, that anyone could turn against Him, and when Satan was able to stir up the malice of the Priests to such a point as he did,

⁸ St. John xvi. 15.

⁹ St. John xiv. 26.

and to pervert the heart even of an Apostle to hate and betray Him, Hell achieved a triumph such as never had been seen before. No one but Satan, it may be said, could have conceived such enormities. An old Christian writer tells us that men said of our Lord, when He was on earth, ‘Let us go to sweetness.’ That may or may not be an authentic tradition, but it must represent a truth. Our Lord’s whole character and conduct were such as they were because of the counsel of God to win men back to Himself by His own loveliness. But if the crowds around the door of the house where He might be, or the people in the villages through which He passed, if the multitudes who only once or twice heard Him preach or saw Him work His miracles, were so inflamed by love for Him, much more must this have been the case with His own familiar friends and spiritual children, on whom He poured out all the riches of His Sacred Heart, overwhelming them, day after day, by fresh demonstrations of His love for them.

It may indeed be thought that the whole conduct of the Apostles, as it is drawn for us in the Gospels, is barely intelligible, unless we take into account the intensity of the love with which they regarded Him. It was a hard life to which He led them; and it soon became apparent that it was a life involving no common dangers. It is not only their faithfulness to Him that is best explained by the intensity of their love, but even their dulness in believing His often repeated predictions about His coming Passion. They could not imagine that such things could be possible—their hearts revolted from the simple imagination, far more than the heart of the most tender of mothers revolts from the thought that her best loved child can be doomed to death, even though she sees it waning and pining away before her eyes. This love for our Lord explains St. Thomas’s difficulty in accepting,

on the witness of others, the fact of the Resurrection, as well as that other most touching exclamation of the same Apostle, ‘Let us also go, that we may die with Him.’¹⁰ It may most truly be said, that no heart less loving than the Heart of our Lord could have devised all that He did and said at the Last Supper, from the washing of the feet of the disciples and the institution of the Blessed Sacrament, to the long discourse which followed, and the prayer to His Father with which the words of that blessed night were closed. But it is also and equally true, that our Lord could not have opened His Heart and poured out all Its tenderness so lavishly to any but men whose love in some measure, as far as was possible, corresponded to His own. The manifestations of God in Heaven are made in the greatest fulness to those orders of blessed spirits who love Him the most, and in proportion to their love. Their love is founded on their knowledge, and in another sense their love wins for them fresh knowledge. And we may say, in the same way, that, if the discourse and the boons of which we are speaking were the fruits of our Lord’s love to His Apostles, it is also true that the love of the Apostles was such as to make them capable of all these blessings.

Thus it is that the foundations of the Apostolate were laid on the tenderest love, and intercourse, and union, between our Lord and His Apostles. No doubt the abiding in Him, and His abiding in them, of which He speaks in that discourse after the institution of the Blessed Sacrament, are to be understood of other unions as well as of that of simple affection. They are to be understood of unity of purpose, of spirit, of doctrine, and method, as well as of love. They imply that of which their personal love for Him was to be the spring and cause, the most perfect external and internal unity of the

¹⁰ St. John xi. 16.

Body of the Church, as well as union with our Lord Himself. It is this very fact, that the whole Christian system is but a growth out of union with our Lord Himself, that gives their peculiar character of blackness, perfidy, treachery, ingratitude, and baseness, to such sins as those of heresy and schism. They are sins which would not be but for what our Lord has done, in the way of love. They are personal outrages on Him, quite as much sins against love to Him, as against truth or obedience. They are the sins of Judas, rather than the sins of Caia-phas or Pilate or Herod. This character in such sins takes away the excuse so often made, that heretics believe much that is true and hold large portions of the Catholic creed. All the worse, then, is their sin against the love to which they owe to our Lord, and which is to be paid in His stead to His Body, the Church. The heretic who makes it his boast that he holds ‘all Catholic doctrine, except that of the Papal supremacy,’ or the schismatic who holds out in rebellion because he thinks that his orders may be valid, or that his mutilated Prayer book may be strained so as to admit of the doctrine of the Real Presence, may believe more particles of the faith than the man who denies our Lord’s Divinity, but he has more ground for loving Him and he loves Him less. He loves Him less, for he lets lesser things keep him from Him. The treason against the law of love is more malicious in proportion as the points of difference are fewer, between the separated Christian communities and the Catholic Church. This is another way in which all the various manners in which we are brought into union with our Lord are seen to merge themselves in personal love for Him.

It is natural for Christian contemplatives to seek for traces of the particular characters of the twelve chosen disciples, as well as of what is still more interesting and important, our Blessed Lord’s treatment of each

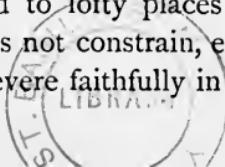
individual soul among them. These two things, as has been said, would certainly illustrate one the other, could we find any sufficient indications to guide us in the investigation. But it seems hardly possible to penetrate the veil, which the shortness of the Gospel accounts throws over matters of this kind in the Life of our Lord. We can gather considerable knowledge of the characters of St. Peter and St. John, from the details of the narrative, especially when we combine these details with the writings of these two most favoured friends of our Lord. In each case the character of the Apostle is to be studied in what he has left behind him, and we have besides, a very considerable amount of light from the prominent places which they fill in the history, as well before as after the Ascension of our Lord. We have in the same way, a good deal that helps towards a knowledge of St. Matthew's character, in the Gospel which he was commissioned to write. St. Paul is not one of the original twelve, but his character also is written for all ages, both in the Acts and in his Epistles. Of the other Apostles we know far less. We have already mentioned the few occasions in which they are specially named in the story of the Life of our Lord, and after the Day of Pentecost they are simply members of the Apostolic body, and we hear nothing of them as individuals. On their own converts and friends, on the whole nations to whom they preached, these glorious servants of Jesus Christ impressed themselves with as much distinctness, as also with as much individuality and beauty, as St. Peter or St. Paul or St. John on those among whom they worked. But everything in this world is so transitory, so fleeting, so short-lived, that the tale of their heroic lives and deaths has been written as on the sand, only to be washed away by the next flow of the tide. To us their names are little more than names.

We can add but very little to what has been already said about them, except what will naturally occur in the course of the narrative as it proceeds.

One question may, however, be spoken of here, as it seems natural to consider that the Evangelists mean to suggest it by the few words which they add to the last name on the list. They always mention that Judas was the traitor. Of the character of this most miserable man we know nothing except as it is manifested in his acts. But it may well be asked, why our Lord allowed such a soul to be numbered among His companions, and to have a share in the very highest vocation of the Apostolate. The answer must be found in the general laws by which God governs the world and human souls, rather than in any special derogation from those laws in the case of the lost Apostle. But we cannot doubt that, if we could trace the whole of our Lord's private dealings with the soul of this false friend, we should come on one of the most beautiful and instructive chapters in the whole history of the Incarnation. We find some remarks on this subject in some of the Fathers, and it may be well to summarize in this place the lessons which they convey.

In the first place, then, it is the teaching of the Fathers that Judas was a good and holy person when our Lord chose him for an Apostle, and when he was sent out to preach and to work miracles. Some contemplatives have thought that Judas obtained his place among the twelve by ambition and pressing, to which our Lord submitted for the sake of the warning which the result might convey as to the terrible character of such attempts to gain high positions in the Church. Some have even said that Judas earnestly begged our Blessed Lady to intercede for him in this matter. These thoughts must be taken for the pious reflections of the

souls from whom they come to us, and nothing more. It is not likely that our Blessed Lady would so far descend as to use her intercession with her Son, in a case in which she must have discerned a danger even in the very eagerness of the application. But it is undoubtedly the case that ambition has played a large and fatal part in the history of the Church and of her Hierarchy, and has given occasion to many most terrible falls and even apostacies. Putting aside these considerations, it may be remarked that the lesson of the fall of Judas would lose some, at least, of its significance if it were supposed that he had had no true vocation from God for the Apostolate, and that his history is the story of one who has aspired to higher things and posts than those for which he was fitted. An error of this kind may often lead to the most calamitous results. But it is said of Judas, as of the other Apostles, that our Lord 'called to Him whom He would Himself.' These words make it unlikely that our Lord called any of the twelve, except because He saw in each at the time the qualities which fitted him for the vocation. Thus it would appear that Judas was really called to this most lofty throne in the Kingdom of God, and that if he had persevered, as he might have persevered, his name would now be in the roll of the Saints with the name of Peter or of John, or any other of the Apostles. Our Lord's mode of acting in this matter is like that which He constantly follows with regard to souls whose fall from faithfulness to Him is only less conspicuous than that of Judas. Just as He offers all men salvation, though He knows that so many will refuse the offer and be the worse throughout all eternity from the fact that it has been made them, so does He constantly call to the perfect following of Himself, and to lofty places in the Church, men whose wills He does not constrain, either to follow the call at first, or to persevere faithfully in it to the end.



No one can suppose, on the other hand, that Peter and John and the remainder of the holy company might not have fallen away as Judas fell away. And it has often been considered as a merciful lesson, vouchsafed by God to those who have the highest vocations and offices in the Church, that He has allowed an Apostle to fall in the most terrible manner, in order that no one may be over-confident in himself, or neglect the proper means by which perseverance may be secured as far as it may be secured. The exact history of the decline of Judas in the spiritual life, and of the various stages by which he reached the final depth of perfidy and apostacy, has not been traced for us in the Gospels. But it is easy to see that the common contemplation, which represents his case as that of a man who neglects to subdue his predominant passion, or to guard himself against those occasions of sin which his vocation or office presents to him, contains a very great amount of truth. Judas sins by pride, by envy, by rash judgment, by hypocrisy, and by other passions, as it seems, also, but the root of his transgression appears to have been his avarice, which was exposed to danger by the fact of his having the custody of the money bag of the little community. Of these matters it will be time to speak, when we come to the part of the Gospel history to which the actual sins of Judas belong.

As has been said, the question why God permitted such a man to be called to the Apostolate, or why our Lord called him to the Apostolate, when He knew that he would incur the very extremest perdition thereby, must be answered rather by general considerations than by any reasons peculiar to the case of Judas or the Apostolate. We have seen that there is no reason for thinking that Judas was not designed for the throne in Heaven which corresponded to his lofty vocation on

earth. It may be well to add one or two words on these general considerations. Certainly, the one great mystery of the whole government of God is the permission of evil, and this runs up into the mystery of the creation of free beings, in whose hands are placed the eternal issues of their use or abuse of their freedom. Why did God create the angels, when He knew that so many of them would become devils? Why did He create man, when He knew that he would fall? Why does He bring into the world so many millions of sinners, of whom He knows that they will be such, and lose their eternal souls? All that we know of God's dealings teaches us one truth, which is enough to answer all these difficulties, as far as they can be answered by us in our present feeble and partial comprehension of the Divine counsels and ways. The truth of which we speak is this, that God does not make it the rule of His government that His foreknowledge should interfere, either with our liberty, or with His treatment of us in our time of probation. It may be that He does use His foreknowledge in many ways and in many cases, as it pleases Him. It may be that He constantly acts, in His government of souls, in a particular manner, because He foresees what would be if He acted otherwise. He may take many a much-loved child away in early youth, because He knows that if the child be spared to become a man, he will lose his soul. It may be that He often afflicts men most severely in the body or in the circumstances of life, because He foreknows that such discipline is the best mercy, and the kindest method of the guidance of those particular persons. But God is not bound, after having made us free, to prevent us from reaping what we sow in the use of our freedom. He must let His creatures, after all, mould their own destiny, as He has decreed they should mould it. The gift of liberty is not an unreality, nor is

it in any respect a hardship or a cruelty, for God provides all men with abundant grace for every possible emergency and danger, so that if they lose themselves, they must be, not only the authors of their own ruin, but most ungrateful and most foolish authors of that ruin. According to this general law, the end of Judas is no more a difficulty in the Providence of God, than the end of any other single sinner, or of any one of the fallen Angels.

The general answer having thus been shortly given, it may be well to point out, after the Fathers, the peculiar fitness, if such a word may be used in such a connection, of the extreme forbearance of our Lord in permitting this man to take his place among the twelve Apostles. In the first place, the presence of Judas in the company of our Lord's chosen followers, gave Him the occasion, from the moment of the first decline, for the exercise of the most wonderful and most heroic charity. It may be said that the picture of our Lord's condescension and mercifulness would be, in a certain sense, incomplete, if we had not this pre-eminent instance of His loving and most ingenious forbearance. He was to teach His disciples, including this very Judas, not yet, probably, less fervent than the others, the doctrine contained in the parable of the wheat and the cockle, and many other kindred truths, such as that the last should be first, and the first last, the fate of the unprofitable servant, and the like. He was to warn them all of the necessity of watchfulness, and of the danger they would run of losing their crowns by negligence. All the time He was Himself exercising the most patient tender care over this soul, of whose danger He was well aware. He had to give His warnings to Judas, even after this time, in such a guise, as not to seem to others to be reproving him. We find that up to the very end, the Apostles had

no idea or suspicion of the treachery of one of their own number. Our Lord was to provide, even for the execution of the dastardly plan of the traitor, by dismissing him from the Cenacle without giving any alarm to the rest, and it is very probable that by doing this He saved him from the commission of further sins into which he might otherwise have fallen. Altogether, we should be without one of the most touching of all the lessons of our Lord's charity, if we had not this example of His treatment of Judas.

There are also other considerations which are worthy of notice. Some of the Fathers say that our Lord showed the strength and solid stability of His work, when He allowed it to be imperilled by so conspicuous a defection, and yet preserved it from all loss thereby. It is remarkable, indeed, how little harm the treachery of apostates from the Catholic Church does to others besides themselves. Judas is but the first of a long series of men who have betrayed our Lord in His Church, sometimes turning against His truth, or against that unity on which He sets so great a store, all the prestige of great talents, distinguished success, or high position in the Hierarchy, and have yet failed most conspicuously to hurt the Church. They are at once seen through by the world itself, their defection is attributed to its right motive, and produces very little effect on others. The crime of Judas was at once understood, even by the wretched priests who had profited by it, and it cast no kind of slur on our Lord or on His religion.

Again, as it belongs to God to be preeminent in forgiving His enemies after their wickedness has been wrought, so does it belong to Him to treat those who are for a time His friends, and whom He knows to be about, at some future time, to turn against Him, as if He had nothing in them to consider beyond the present

loyal state of their hearts. This is a kind of anticipated forgiveness and mercy, which belongs to Him alone. He loves them heartily, as long as they remain deserving of His love, and He does not look forward to the time when they will no longer deserve it. Just so He rewards in this world, by many a temporal blessing, the good works of those of whom He knows that they will prevent Him by their sins from giving them any reward hereafter.

Moreover, our Lord took on Him all the infirmities of our nature which it was possible for Him to assume, and He suffered in every way in which it was possible for Him to suffer. It is a part of our natural weakness to be liable to be deceived in our supposed friends, to be deserted, abandoned, betrayed, cast off. Our Lord could not be deceived, but He could let things go on as if He were deceived, and so expose Himself to all this class of human miseries. If this kind of Cross, often the hardest of all to bear, was to fall so often on His servants and on His Church, how would it have been in accordance with the general character of our Lord's life among us, for Him to have exempted Himself from this sort of severe affliction? He was to be the consolation and support of His servants in every sort of woe, and how could He have been so in this, by having shared it, and taught us how to bear it, and behave under it, but for the presence of the traitor among the twelve?

Lastly, the toleration of Judas among the Apostles was an occasion, beyond all others in His life, in which our Lord manifested the method of God's providence by which it is His custom to bring good out of evil. The treason of Judas was, humanly speaking, the immediate cause of the working out of the salvation of the world. It would seem as if there were something in the order of Divine Truth which goes beyond the simple lesson of

the forbearance which we are to practise towards those who are our enemies, and the like. It seems as if we were meant to learn that evil has its place in the providence of God, according to the present state of the world, and the present condition of human nature, that we might miss many benefits and blessings if there were not evil men to persecute, and so to purify the Church, if the tolerance of evil were not one of the highest titles which we can obtain for the mercy of God to ourselves, and that the glory of God might be less than it is if it were not so constantly increased by the good which results in so many ways, from the evil which seems designed to diminish it.

These are some of the considerations which Christian writers have drawn from the existence of the future traitor in the midst of the chosen band of Apostles. At the time of which we are now speaking, there was, except to the Divine foreknowledge of our Lord, no reason for doubting that Judas might persevere and end his life, like the other Apostles, after long labours for God, by a glorious death. For all we know, he may have been in the front rank of the general body of the disciples. He may have been the child of holy parents, brought up in a good and religious home, he may have been a willing disciple of St. John, and have drunk in with eagerness the gracious teaching of the first year of our Lord's ministry. He may have had natural qualities such as endeared him to all around him, and made them nourish high hopes for his future career, and he may have been so faithful to grace as to rejoice the blessed Angel's heart to whose charge he had been committed. Such, alas, has often been the beginning of a life which has ended in perdition. We have no reason for thinking of him, up to the present point of the history, as different from the rest of his companions. The little

paradise of the community now gathered round the Son of Man was not yet defiled by the triumph of the evil one, nor are we told how soon the tempter made his way to the heart of his future victim. Our Lord's teaching, as we shall see, soon became full of notes of warning, which may or may not have been especially directed by Him to the heart of Judas. The first distinct intimation of his evil state comes at a much later time, and it may be thought probable that it was the falling away of many disciples, after our Lord's definite teaching concerning the Blessed Sacrament, that first shook the loyalty of Judas, as it has been the occasion of thousands of apostacies since. But of this it will be time to speak when we approach that point in the Public Life of our Lord.

CHAPTER III.

The Office of the Preacher.

St. Matt. iii. 13—19 ; St. Luke vi. 12—16 ; *Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 46.

WE may now pass on to the second great element in the Apostolate, as it is indicated by the Evangelist St. Mark, who, after saying that our Blessed Lord chose the twelve, ‘that they might be with Him,’ adds : ‘And that He might send them out to preach.’ This part of the Apostolic office may be considered as the most essential and intrinsic of all, inasmuch as it is that part which is expressed in the very name of Apostle. But it is noteworthy that it is not put the first in order, and we may well see in this a reference to the truth, that the missionary part of the Apostolic life and work grows out of the former, that is, out of the union with our Lord and the love of Him, which is the inevitable issue of that union. It is as true to say that the love of our Lord generates the Apostolic spirit in this particular, as to say that union and familiarity with our Lord give birth to intense love for Him. For the great passion of our Lord was the love for souls and the desire to help them, and in proportion as persons draw near to Him and understand His Sacred Heart, just in the same proportion do they become inflamed with zeal for souls. We see this in the great contemplative saints, such as St. Teresa, whose sex and whole vocation forbade to her the active exercise of any Apostolic ministry, but who nevertheless founded her reform of Mount Carmel

mainly from a desire to help in the conversion of souls, by living the kind of life of strict observance and of the practice of the virtues of her calling, which might make her prayers, and those of her religious sisters, powerful as aids to the missionaries and teachers of the Gospel, whose work lay in immediate contact with the souls for which she was so anxious for the sake of our Lord. Thus the companionship with Jesus Christ, which became the daily life of the twelve after they were called to the Apostolate, was not only necessary to ground them in the principles and instruct them in the methods which they were afterwards to apply in the fulfilment of their great commission. It was also the spring of all their activity and the source of all their zeal. Thus, as many holy writers have observed, when our Lord gave to St. Peter his office of being, in His own place, the Pastor of the whole flock of the Church, He premised to the delivery of the commission the thrice repeated question, ‘Lovest thou Me?’¹ as if to teach him, that the one great indispensable qualification for the discharge of the office of the Supreme Shepherd was always to be the love of his Lord and Master.

It is also very remarkable that it is this one ordinance of Christian preaching, which is selected by our Lord as the object to be assigned in the formation and selection of the Apostles. Afterwards they were to have many other sublime functions, functions of the highest moment, which have been handed on by them, at least in great measure, to the ordinary rulers of the Church. Many of these functions, such as the exercise of the priestly power over the Body of Christ and over the members of His Mystical Body, in the consecration of the Holy Sacrifice, and in the Sacraments of Penance or Orders, have a sublime and unearthly character. They

¹ St. John xxi. 15, 16, 17.

bring our Lord down on the altar, and the decisions which they make, in loosing or binding souls, are ratified in Heaven. The forces of the spiritual world are at their command, to an extent which cannot be asserted of the exercise of their mission as the preachers of the Word of God, although that exercise, like others, cannot be considered a simply human action. In any case, the preaching of the Word of God remains now as one only among many functions of the Christian ministry, a function which is freely communicated, even to many who hold but an inferior rank in that ministry itself. But its position in this passage would be enough to remind us of the prominent place which it has occupied in the Kingdom of our Lord from the very beginning, a place of which nothing can deprive it. This place belongs to it on two grounds; first, on account of the importance of faith as the door to the Christian privileges, and again from the nature of the case, which makes preaching the necessary foundation of all knowledge of the Law of God and of the Sacraments of the Church. Nothing is said in this place of any of the Sacraments, even of the Sacrament of Baptism, or the Sacrament of Penance. The Sacrament of Baptism, must have been administered, to some at least, from a very early period in the public career of our Lord, and the Sacrament of Penance is clearly in our Lord's mind before this time, as He very plainly alludes to it in the miracle on the Paralytic. But the Apostles themselves were not made priests till the night before the Passion, and the general commission to baptize was not given till after the Resurrection. The ordinance of preaching thus preceded the sacraments if not as to the date of its institution, at least as to its exercise, in the gradual training of the Apostles and the propagation of the Gospel Kingdom.

'Faith,' as St. Paul says, 'cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ,'² that is, by preaching. And, just before, he says, 'How shall they call upon Him, in Whom they have not believed? or how shall they believe Him of Whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? and how shall they preach unless they be sent?'³ As long, therefore, as faith remains the condition of salvation, so long will the preaching of the Word of God remain the necessary preliminary of faith. Preaching is spoken of by the same Apostle as the special instrument devised by God for the salvation of the world. If there was anything of the sort, strictly speaking, in the world before our Lord came, at all events He took it up and breathed into it a new life. The heathen philosophers taught, but they did not preach. The Jewish Scribes taught, but did not preach. The most complete anticipation of the Christian preaching was in the earnest warnings and pleadings of the prophets, as our Lord says that the people of Ninive did penance at the preaching of Jonas.⁴ There are several passages in Isaías, in Jeremias, in Ezechiel, and other prophets, in which we see reference to something which in our sense would be preaching. But the whole prophetical office was occasional and not regular. The prophets filled the place, in the elder dispensation, which is occupied in the Gospel system by the saints and great founders or doctors, rather than by the hierarchy and ordinary ministry. It is essential in preaching that the speaker should speak with authority, and not rest on reasoning nor adduce arguments, the whole force of which lies in logical connection. The cogency of preaching lies in the person, more than in his argument, though the preacher may use argument, as he may use any other lawful method of persuasion. Thus

² Rom. x. 17.

³ Rom. x. 14, 15.

⁴ St. Matt. xii. 41.

preaching was chosen by God, as St. Paul tells us, as a thing which the world would despise, and he calls it the ‘foolishness of preaching.’⁵ For all authoritative teaching is foolishness to those who do not recognize any authority in the person who speaks. ‘For seeing that, in the wisdom of God, the world, by wisdom, knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believed.’ That is, as faith itself, though most reasonable, is despised as a childish thing by the wise and learned of the world (who yet exact from their hearers and disciples an amount of faith in their personal opinions and sayings which is absolutely unreasonable), so the whole method by which faith is conveyed to the soul, according to the ordinance of God, appears foolishness to the world at large, because the evidence on which the message of the preacher rests is contained, not in the argument itself, but in his own authority, externally accredited by miracles, prophecy, and the like. And yet, as St. Paul tells us, it was the chosen method of God. To say this implies, not only that it was most wise, most merciful, most reasonable, but that God was, in a manner, pledged by His own choice of preaching as the means of salvation, to assist both preacher and hearer with abundant stores of grace.

Our Lord, in introducing this new weapon, so to speak, for the work of the instruction and salvation of mankind, did not certainly go beyond the use of ordinary and natural influence for the moving of hearts and the enlightenment of minds. On the contrary, He took up one of the most ordinary means of persuasion, if not the most ordinary of all. In His hands, preaching became endowed with the force of the supernatural system by which He worked, but, even in the natural order the power of the spoken word is the greatest power that can

be brought to bear on the masses of mankind. It had already been used from the beginning of society, and its use had flourished, more than anywhere else, amid the free communities of states in Greece and Rome which had been the chief centres of cultivation, of intellectual activity, of literature and the fine arts, as well as the communities into whose hands the empire of the civilized world had gradually passed. The efforts of great speakers in the political and judicial arenas had produced a series of great works, which stand in the literature of the most polished nations of the globe by the side of the noblest remains of poetry or philosophy. But the influence of the spoken word was never, even in the natural order, confined to the educated nations alone, nor to the educated classes in any nation. The whole history of the world shows that this power can move the multitude, the savage, the illiterate, as well as those who can pass an intellectual judgment on the oratory addressed to them. This power does not reach to the mind alone, it can stir the passions and inflame the heart, as nothing else can stir and inflame them. It is far greater than the power of literature as such on those whom it can reach. It can touch many who have no appreciation of the charms and magic of poetry. It is the natural weapon of all those who would move their fellow-men. In a system of which faith was the foundation, it was impossible, so to say, but that the spoken word should assume an immense importance. Our Lord freely took it up, with all its powers and all its immense dangers, and He did much to enhance the first and diminish the last. In the first place, He subordinated the persuasive and demonstrative phases of the spoken word to the simple didactic and dogmatic application of this great power. The Apostles and their successors had a message to deliver,

and they proved their authority in the same way as He had proved His. In the second place, by making the salvation of the hearers the one end of the Christian preaching, He excluded all the lower aims and intentions by which the use of so mighty a weapon might be degraded. In the third place the Apostles had His own example and practice to look to as their guide in the preaching of the Word of God. Thus they were guarded against all want of simplicity, all affectation, all seeking for applause, while they gained from their knowledge of Him and of His ways the very highest appreciation of the dignity and high importance of the weapon He placed in their hands, and of the duty of wielding it at the cost of extreme labour, without human respect, with great assiduity, with great constancy, with immense prudence, and with the accompaniment of continual prayer. But they did not, as appears from the Acts, neglect the prudence and careful study of their audiences, which were suggested by their knowledge of human nature, as if it were wrong to study the peculiarities of place and persons and to take pains to win and please while delivering their Divine message. They did not fling the Word of God, because it was His Word, like pearls before swine, nor consider themselves exempted from all the measures and temperaments which Christian charity might suggest, to make the Divine treasure acceptable to those to whom it was their duty to minister it. This principle extends, as we see in the case of St. Paul, who if we may venture to say so, was a born orator, to the use of rhetorical methods and the most ingenious arts of persuasion.

The age in which the Church came into the world was a time when the spoken word was losing its power, because it was losing its freedom, in the decisions of political government. The fate of Cicero at the hands

of the second Triumvirate had shown to the world under the Roman sway, that the despotism that was to succeed to the Republic could not allow freedom of speech in public assemblies. Oratory was still, however, abundantly cultivated, not only for its forensic use, but as the accomplishment of persons of high education. The world under the Cæsars was a world of rhetoricians, and this fact is necessary to explain much which is strange to us in the Roman society of that period, as well as to account for the literary excellence, combined with unreality, of the historians and poets of the silver age. Declamations and recitations were the common entertainments of a large class in the higher society. St. Paul's speech, before Festus, Agrippa, and Berenice, was probably looked upon by them as an exhibition of this kind, for it had no object, except to inform Festus what he should say in his letter to Rome, when he sent his prisoner to the tribunal to which he had appealed. It is possible that this fashion of declamation on a given subject may have occasionally assisted the spreading of knowledge of Christian truths, during the ages which intervened before the Church was allowed by the edict of Constantine to build her sacred edifices all over the empire, and thus make the hearing of the Word of God, in its proper sense, possible to large populations. But it is certain that the great days of Christian preaching began, in our sense of the terms, after the emancipation of Christianity by the first Christian Emperor, and that, up to that time, the series of the great preachers does not commence. Christianity was spread by personal influence and communication, more than by public and popular teaching, as is the case now in those parts of the world where persecution still fetters the open propagation of the faith. It is thus that we learn that Christian preaching may go on, in the sense in which it is essential

to the formation of the Christian community, under circumstances which forbid the exercise of preaching in its most strict acceptation.

It would, however, be unwise to conclude from this, that the ordinance of which we are speaking can ever be neglected without the greatest detriment to the Church. It is not, like the gift of miracles, a gift which may be, in some large measure, confined to the earliest ages in which the Church has more especial need for it, or to cases in later times in which the circumstances of the early ages are repeated, as when the Christian truths are presented, for the first time, to savage populations who have never heard of our Lord or of His Church. It is, indeed, a mistake to think that the Church can ever be without the actual exercise of the gifts of miracles or of prophecy, though it is undoubted that these gifts are not so common in one age as in another. But the ordinance of preaching can never be superseded. The effects produced by miracles or prophecy can be supplied, in great measure, by the existence itself of the Catholic Church, the one great standing miracle in the eyes of all the world. But nothing can supply the absence of the Word of God. It is far more true to say that the state of the Church in any age, or in any country, depends in a very great measure indeed on the use which is then and there made of the ordinance of preaching. The ages of decay and decline have always been ages when the preaching in the Church had declined first. The use of the Sacraments, it may be said, the practice of confession and communion, the use of prayer and of the solemn services and other means of grace, are things independent of preaching, and have in them a constant spring of Divine grace, which cannot always be asserted of the habit of hearing sermons. Thus, many persons are in the habit of thinking that they can dispense with the practice of hearing the Word

of God, without detriment to their spiritual state, as others, in the same way, neglect altogether the reading of the Word of God. The mistake in each case is very great, and very pernicious. In the case of the great mass of Christians, they need the constant preaching of the Word to keep up in their minds any right knowledge as to the Sacraments and the other means of grace, and much more do they need the same Divine Word to rouse their consciences to the state in which they are, to the practice of the necessary Christian virtues and duties of their state, and to move their hearts to the use of what knowledge they possess. It is as foolish to think that men will live up to the standard of Christian virtue, merely because they know what they ought to be, as to think that a heathen nation can be converted by being taught to read, and then supplied with shiploads of Bibles.

As a matter of fact, the neglect of the Sacraments and of prayer are the inseparable results, in the masses of the population, of the silence or of the degeneracy of the Christian Pulpit, and it is quite possible for superstition, or ignorance, or even heresy, to take possession of minds that are not fed by the living Word, even though they have the Sacraments at hand and are well supplied with churches. To deprive a Catholic population of the Word of God, as preached in the churches, is to threaten it with the extinction of all vigour in its spiritual life. The essential materials of such life may be there, but the light is wanting to guide men to their use and to stir up the will to enforce obedience to the light. The profitable use of the Christian means of grace requires a very considerable development of the moral intelligence, and also of the manly vigour of the will in choosing and refusing. This is so true, that it is notorious that a well trained Catholic population, even of peasants who are unable to read or

to write, is far more intellectually developed and far more manly in character than another population by its side, which may be in a higher stage as to the mere externals of education, but which has not been taught to pray, to apply its faith to the daily problems of life, to examine its conscience, to frequent the Sacraments of Penance and of Holy Communion. But the proper instrument of the training of the minds, and hearts, and consciences of the Catholic people is the Word of God in the widest acceptation of the term, ranging from the simplest catechetical instruction to the highest kinds of Christian eloquence.

On the other hand, of all the means of grace which we possess in the Church, the use of the ordinance of preaching is that which it is most easy to neglect, on account of the large part in it which appears simply human. It requires the eye of faith to see that this is a means of grace, through which God works most powerfully, and that it is not the word of man alone, producing no effects on the soul but such as are simply human. Thus we find many Christians, otherwise good and careful over the interests of their souls, habitually neglecting sermons, and saying to themselves that they know beforehand all that the preacher can say. Such language is in effect to deny that preaching is an ordinance of God which conveys grace to the soul, by which the heart and will are moved and the intelligence enlightened, in a manner quite independent of the capacities of the particular preacher. The true children of the Church think and act very differently. We find souls full of spiritual wisdom and lore, souls accustomed to the most familiar intercourse with God, like St. Teresa, who will think no sermon dull or tedious, no opportunity of hearing a preacher a thing to be passed by, and who will delight in every occasion of what is to them a spiritual feast. It

cannot be doubted which of these two states of mind is the more Christian and the more salutary. The contempt—for it sometimes amounts to contempt—of the spoken word, is of most dangerous consequence to the soul. Men become full of their own ideas on religious matters, even in doctrine, they grow hard, self-centred, opinionated, critical of everything they hear and of every person around them, or again, and much more frequently, they become the prey of an universal sloth or tepidity, which makes their prayers worth almost nothing, their use of the Sacraments most unprofitable, their zeal for the interests of the Church and the cause of our Lord in the world altogether cold and dead, or at least narrow, which shuts up their hearts against the poor and makes them easy victims to violent temptations of passion and self-indulgence. And the root of the whole evil, the origin of their decline in spirituality and, perhaps, even their loss of virtue and of faith, may be found in the indolent pride with which they either neglect altogether to hear the Word of God, or, when they do hear it, sit in judgment on what they hear with all the arrogance of literary critics.

If it is thus dangerous to give in to the natural temptation—especially natural in days of shallow but universal education—of sitting in judgment on the Word of God as delivered in the Christian Church by her ordinary ministers, and of forgetting altogether both its sacred character and the Divine aids by which its fruits are secured in humble and pious minds and hearts, there is also an equal danger to the ministers of the Word themselves, lest, by any negligence or other fault of theirs, the people should be encouraged in the low view which is sometimes taken of this holy function. The times of decline and degradation, of which we have spoken, as having been marked by the neglect of the hearing of the

Word of God, have generally been what they were from the faults of the clergy as well as, or more than, from the faults of the people. A corrupt or worldly clergy can never long continue the diligent preaching of the Word of God. The exercise of this function is too much of a rebuke to themselves for it to remain palatable or even tolerable. It is, in a true sense, the most delicate function in the whole range of the Apostolate, even more delicate in this aspect, than the ministry of the Sacrament of Penance itself, because in that case the good or the evil is confined to single souls, while the faults or errors of the preacher affect at once considerable bodies of men. It is necessary for the hearers to keep up in themselves high ideas of the dignity of this office, and to maintain that idea against the practical temptations presented by the cavillings of those who persist in regarding it as a merely human function. It is no less necessary for the preacher himself to understand the immense responsibilities which are laid on him, and the amount of prayer and of all possible preparation, which is required for the right discharge of those responsibilities.

Instead of more on this subject, for which this is not the place, we may find in the simple words of the Evangelist a great trait of what is essential in this respect. The Apostles were first of all to be with our Lord, and then He was to send them out to preach. The language of St. Mark does not contain even a hint of that physical separation from our Lord which was necessary in the case of their mission, as if to imply that their union with their Divine Master was to be kept up, in a most true and perfect manner, even while they were away from Him—such union being possible and necessary in the spiritual and moral sense, though not so in the physical. Thus the Apostles were to be like the holy Angels, who perform their work over the whole face of the universe, and yet

are always standing before God in the closest union with Him. In the same way the Apostles must be united to our Lord in the discharge of their great office. Other qualifications might be dispensed with, such as learning, or eloquence, or a stately presence, and the like. But this of union with our Lord, never. These two things, the union with Him and their mission by Him to preach, are so closely joined together in the sacred history, to show, as it seems, that the last grows necessarily out of the first. The effect of that intimate knowledge of our Lord which the Apostles enjoyed was that they became fit to preach His Word and in His name. It made them know what to say and how to say it, how to conduct themselves in all the circumstances of their mission, how to labour fruitfully, and suffer patiently, what the message was they were to deliver to the souls of men, and how to make their own delivery of it a repetition of His own. Such thoughts as these expanded in meditation would be enough to furnish us with a complete explanation of the duties of the Christian missioner. They would include all the various forms and degrees of union with our Lord which are necessary for such functions—union, not only in grace and love, but in doctrine and teaching, in purpose and intention, in spirit and in manner, in obedience, in the poverty and humility of life which He insisted on, in readiness to become the servants of others for His sake, and the like.

CHAPTER IV.

Powers and Duties of the Apostles.

St. Matt. iii. 13—19; St. Luke vi. 12--16; *Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 46.

ST. MARK adds to his short account of the objects of our Lord, in the institution of the Apostolate, two more particulars, which are of wide and pregnant meaning. These are, that He gave the Apostles the twofold power, to heal diseases and cast out devils. These powers may be considered as necessary to the Apostles, in order that they might authenticate their mission by miracles of mercy, as our Lord had authenticated His own mission. It would be necessary for them, having no mission, in the ordinary sense of the term, from the authorities at Jerusalem, and preaching, not in their own name, but yet with authority in the name of their Master, to possess some such evidence that their mission came from God, especially as they had not the priestly character as St. John Baptist had, nor the austerity of life for which he was singular, and which secured to him so much veneration. It was natural that the preachers of the Kingdom of Heaven, who spoke with authority and came from such close companionship with the Incarnate Word Himself, should have had communicated to them some of the powers inherent in His Sacred Humanity, and that in this way also, their preaching should be identified with His. This, then, might suffice as an explanation of these powers as given to the Apostles, and which we cannot doubt that they

exercised freely and with perfect success. But there are also other aspects of this commission, on which Christian contemplation may profitably linger.

We know that our Lord would never consent to accredit His mission by what was a mere sign from Heaven, and nothing more than a sign, such as had been some of the signs mentioned in the Old Testament. The reasons why He thus refused will be more properly stated when we come to the incident of the request directly made to Him to do what He declined to do. It is enough to say here that the occasions on which "signs," as such, had been vouchsafed in the Old Testament, as in the case of Moses or of Gedeon, were cases in which there was no other ordained witness provided by God for the purpose of accrediting the messenger or declaring His will. The case of our Lord, to Whom all the Law and the Prophets bore witness, was widely different. Again, He never used His miraculous powers for mere ostentation, any more than for the hurt or destruction of anything, for the withering of the fig-tree near Jerusalem was quite as much a parable as a miracle.¹ He always showed His mission to be one of mercy, and it would be a partial and incomplete account of His miracles to represent them as simply evidences of power and nothing more. Our Lord's miracles were merciful acts, flowing from the tenderness of His Sacred Heart, as He found Himself in the midst of so much human misery. It is natural to think that if He had had no Divine mission to assert and to prove, He might still have wrought His miracles out of pure compassion. Nor has He restricted the exercise of miraculous powers in His Church, simply to cases in which the existence of such powers might be useful in some sort of evidential way. Con-

¹ St. Matt. xxi. 19; St. Mark xi. 14.

sidered as evidences, His miracles were such as they were on account of the various forms of human misery existing at the time and in the places, when and where He preached. They symbolized and set forth in a series of beautiful images the healing and delivering power with which He was invested for the benefit of souls, the maladies of which are so much more grievous than those of the body, which indeed are, in a true sense, the remote or the near consequences of the evils of the soul. In this way also the miracles of our Lord were evidences, not simply that He was sent by God, but also that He was sent by God for the healing and salvation of mankind. Mankind lay under two great miseries, the misery of physical suffering, the consequences of the fall, and the misery of moral suffering and evil, also the fruit and sequel of original sin, but not unconnected with the bondage to the devil in which he had placed himself by his rebellion against his Maker. Thus the tyranny of the devil was as real an evil as the inheritance of human misery in the physical order, and it was manifested, even to the outward eye by the possessions by devils which were then so common, and which are still to be met with far more frequently than the men of our time like to be told. Our Lord's dominion over the devils was thus another great evidence of His Divine mission, parallel to His power over diseases. His casting out the devils was also, like His healing of diseases, not simply an evidence of power, but an act of mercy, which represented to the outward senses and perceptions the power which He possessed, in the simply spiritual order, of delivering men from the bondage of Satan, a power the exercise of which might be felt by those in whose favour it was exercised, but could not be directly perceived by the outward eye.

These two powers, then, were now imparted to the Apostles by our Lord as belonging to their office. No doubt, as has been said, they were most necessary and most fitting, in the case of persons sent out, as they were, to preach in His name. They were evidences such as those which He Himself adduced. But they must also have represented, to the minds of the Apostles themselves and to the minds of others, the character of their mission and of the Gospel itself, in favour of which they were granted. They must have fostered in their hearts the tender compassion and charity which they had learnt by their intercourse with their Lord Himself. And much more than this may be said on this point. For it is inevitable that hearts so moved, in imitation of the Sacred Heart Itself, to the constant assistance of their neighbours' maladies, and to their deliverance from the bondage of Satan, when that bondage had reached the terrible stage of possession, must have been full of compassion for ordinary evils of the same kind with those which they had extraordinary powers of relieving. When they met with sick who could be comforted by such services as can be rendered by those who have no miraculous power to heal diseases, and with the victims of the tyranny of the evil one in temptation, and other spiritual assaults, short of the phenomena of possession, it must be quite certain that all the sympathy and help which the occasion permitted would have been given them by the Apostles, who had lived so intimately with our Lord. And it may well be considered as intended in the Divine counsels, that the miraculous powers vouchsafed, in these extraordinary cases, to Apostolic men may have been granted in order that it may be well understood in the Church, that it is a part of the Apostolic mission to love all works of charity, and to consider them as a duty belonging to

the office of those who have to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ. To the first Apostles our Lord said, as we shall see, when He sent them forth to preach : ‘ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out devils, freely you have received, freely give.’² The spirit which was to animate all these acts of mercy is not the less enjoined on the Apostolic office, because these particular manifestations of its mercifulness are not within the power of all Apostolic men. If the sick cannot be healed, they are to be cared for, if the dead cannot be raised to life, they can be prayed for, if the devils cannot be cast out, they can be prayed against and resisted by the Word of God, the administration of the sacraments, and the offering of the adorable Sacrifice. The miracles wrought by the Apostles were to be, to the world at large, the evidences of their mission. The proofs of the divinity of the ordinary Apostolate in the Church must be found in the constant exercise of works of charity, to bodies as well as souls, and in the constant conflict of the missioner against the influence of the devils in society as well as in individuals.

It cannot be doubted that one of the greatest evidences of Christianity, in its conflict with Paganism in the time of the Roman Empire as yet unconverted, was the charity displayed by the Christians among themselves and towards others. It is impossible to read the Epistles of St. Paul, without seeing that he did his best to breathe into his converts the spirit of corporal, as well as of spiritual, mercy. If we look to the lives of the great Apostolic Saints, we find there not only the constant use of miraculous powers in help of the sick, but also great devotion to the sick-bed, great charity and care for the sufferers who could not be relieved, or who

² St. Matt. x. 8.

were not relieved, by the exercise of preternatural powers. The first instinct of the Apostolic heart is the relief of suffering in whatever form it presents itself, and the ordinary charities, so to speak, of the saints are as beautiful as their miracles and far more universal and multitudinous. The works of St. Vincent de Paul are as completely and thoroughly Apostolic as the wonders wrought by St. Vincent Ferrer. No Apostolic man ever turned away from the poor, the sick, the afflicted, in any kind or phase of human suffering. Thus the lesson of the miraculous powers here granted to the Apostles becomes practical in the highest degree, to all in the Church who have any share in their great office and commission.

The same may be said, with equal truth, of the other power mentioned in this place, the power to cast out devils. It is a part of the instinct which God breathes into the truly Apostolic heart, to recognize in a far more than ordinary way, the truth that the conflict of the Christian preacher is not with man alone, not with flesh and blood, as St. Paul puts it in the Epistle to the Ephesians, but with ‘principalities and powers, against the rulers of the world of this darkness, against the spirits of wickedness in the high places.’³ That part of his Epistle is particularly addressed to the priests and sacred ministers of the Church, or churches, to which he was writing, and he speaks as if this was a truth of which persons in their position might need to be reminded. It is a characteristic of the saints of God, to recognize the action of the powers of evil in the more ordinary events of the day, as they seem to be. They see the agency of Satan in the discord which arises among Christians and Catholics, in the mischief that is the result of the opposition to good works and

³ Ephes. vi. 12.

holy enterprizes on the part of good people, in the intemperate zeal of some and the forward ambition of others, the jealousies which prevent good, or the rashness by which good is attempted only to be discredited. They see Satan in the seeming accidents which befall the workers of good, in the storms which shipwreck the vessels in which missionaries are borne to distant lands, in the deaths of children after baptism, which prejudice newly converted tribes against the teachers of the faith, in the working of the evil eye and the evil tongue, not more than in the physical catastrophes which often work so much mischief in the world. Everywhere and on every occasion, they expect the opposition of the powers of darkness, and they take this opposition into their calculations with as much certainty as the leader of a political party, who considers beforehand what his enemies will say or do, in any given crisis or cast of circumstances. The casting out of the devils from the bodies of the possessed was but one incident in the warfare in which the Apostles were unceasingly engaged against the powers of Hell. And the fact that this gift was committed to them, on their first call to their high office, may serve to remind those who tread in their footsteps, without having any preternatural authority over the devils, that the warfare is the same now as then, and the malice of the evil spirits not less in our days than in those in which they were permitted, by the providence of God, to afflict mankind in ways and manners which are comparatively unknown to later times, at least in the more civilized countries, in which the Church has been more or less in possession for many generations. These two Apostolic instincts, then, must be as vigorous and as incessant in their activity in the Catholic priest or preacher, throughout all time, as in the hearts of the Twelve themselves—the conviction

that they have, as a part of their mission, a duty to practise to the utmost all works of charity, and the constant daily and hourly sense of the presence and malice of the unsleeping and implacable spiritual foes whose powers they are sent to destroy.

CHAPTER V.

The Sermon on the Plain.

St. Luke vi. 17—49; *Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 47, 48, 49.

SOMETHING has already been said, in a former part of this work, on the question which has been frequently raised concerning the identity, or difference, between the Sermon of which we are now about to speak, and which is given by St. Luke alone, and the great Sermon on the Mount of which we have spoken at length in former volumes. Our readers will be prepared to find that it would be quite out of harmony with the principles on which this work has been designed, to consider these two Sermons as having been, in their occasion and delivery, one and the same. That their contents are, to a considerable degree, identical, cannot be denied, nor can any one wish to deny so obvious, and, at the same time, so instructive a truth. It is an instructive truth, because, as will be seen presently, it is extremely important to see our Lord setting the example of that repetition of the same subject-matter to different audiences, which has always been the custom with those who have had large experience of the duty of preaching His Word, and to be able to study the manner in which He has, here and elsewhere, shaped

His delivery of the greater truths, in accordance with the requirements or capacities of various audiences.

It would indeed be a great loss that we should be obliged to acknowledge, if so it were, that we have here, in St. Luke, merely the Evangelist's own adaptation, so to speak, of the Sermon on the Mount. Such a belief would render it almost useless to study the exact words of any of the great discourses of our Lord, as revealing to us the working of His own Divine mind. This is not to say that we should lose thereby the whole fruit of these divinely recorded sermons, nor is it necessary to blame those very numerous interpreters of Sacred Scripture who have not felt any difficulty in the theory which we are ourselves combating. The words of Scripture are the words of the Holy Ghost, and nothing less, however large a part may be allowed to the human writers from whose pens they come to us. But there are other reasons, besides these just now mentioned, for clinging tenaciously to the principles of exposition which we have adopted. Such reasons are to be found in the constant method of St. Luke, already more than once alluded to, of inserting in his Gospel things like to what St. Matthew and St. Mark had inserted, rather than exactly the same things. Again, it must be remembered, that a close study of the Gospel history reveals the truth that our Lord was constantly influenced, in the degrees of reserve on the one hand, or openness on the other, with which He communicated His Divine doctrine, by the circumstances of the moment, especially and most notably by the amount of resistance to His teaching which He experienced, and by the state of the minds of the people to whom He addressed Himself. This principle of conduct on the part of our Blessed Lord would require a very considerable change in His manner of teaching at the time at which we are now arrived, and

we shall very soon have to record a still more remarkable change in this respect, when we come to speak of His adoption of the form of parables, as the only form in which, after a certain time, He set forth the truths on which He wished to insist to the mass of the people. We should lose a great deal in our knowledge of our Lord's method, if we were not able to dwell on it in such a case as the present.

A close examination of the history, based entirely on the data furnished us by the Evangelists themselves, and requiring no other hypothesis to start from than that of their intimate acquaintance with the narrative on which they were occupied, their carefulness in the arrangement of their matter, and in the silent notes of transition and the like, which they themselves give us, shows us beyond a doubt that the time at which the delivery of this Sermon must be fixed is a date considerably advanced in the second year of our Lord's preaching, after He had been to Jerusalem for the second of the Paschs which occurred within the period of His active Ministry, and after His return from Jerusalem into Galilee. To say this is to say a great deal as to the change which had come over the circumstances under which His preaching was now to be carried on, even in Galilee. He had been most decidedly rejected by the priests and authorities at Jerusalem. He had braved their opposition by the great miracle wrought at the pool on the Sabbath day, and this had led to that long and formal discussion, between Himself and them, of which St. John has given us the account in his fifth chapter. After that decided breach between our Lord and the authorities, the whole condition of His teaching was altered. We find the Evangelists dwelling especially at this time on the incidents which marked the bitter hostility of the Priests and Pharisees to our Lord. This

is the purport of their account of the criticism on our Lord for allowing the disciples to pluck the ears of corn on the Sabbath, and of the other miracle on the Sabbath day which soon followed. Then we have the record of the new method of conduct adopted by our Lord, in which St. Matthew, according to his custom, sees the fulfilment of one of the beautiful prophecies of Isaias. All this is now familiar to our readers. It is clear that the conditions under which He now taught were largely different from those under which He had taught during the first year and at the time when the great Sermon on the Mount had been delivered.

It must not be supposed that the Evangelists tell us the whole story of the kind of organized persecution which had now set in. The coalition, as we should term it, between the Pharisees and the Herodians, that is, the appeal made by the religious party opposed to our Lord to the courtiers and political agents of the Tetrarch, was not likely to evaporate in a few strong words, or in half useless measures. The priests at Jerusalem, who were at the head of this coalition, were extremely influential, and their influence was great even in Galilee. Even materially, they had great means at their disposal, on account of the immense alms of which they were the stewards, sent by the Jews all over the world, both for the Temple and for the poor in Palestine. The machinery of government, the bureaucracy, the police, the courts of the Tetrarch, were at the command of the allies with whom the Pharisees were now joined. It cannot be supposed that the design of destroying our Lord was a mere half-hearted velleity. Neither the malice nor the means of execution could long be wanting. The priests at Jerusalem were becoming more and more imbued with that stern blood-thirsty, heretical spirit, of the action of which we have so many instances

in all ages of the Church and not least in our own. Nor can it be supposed that the priests lost their power over the people, the moment they opposed themselves to our Lord. No doubt the multitude still thronged to Him from all parts, in some measure for the sake of His miracles, and in some measure, also, for the sake of His Divine teaching. But the time was now come for that sifting of the wheat from the chaff, which is a necessary element in the history of all great religious movements which have in them the germs of truth. The ears of the people were filled with calumnies against our Lord. His teaching was represented as contrary to that of Moses, and as condemned by the authorities of the sacred nation. It was fast becoming a dangerous thing to be His adherent, and, in any large multitude there are always many simple and courageous souls, but also not a few who will follow a movement or a leader as long as he is favoured, and as long as his followers do not lose by him, but who will drop off as soon as their own interests, or those of any who are near them, are attacked or endangered by the enemies of the new teaching. We shall soon have to speak of our Lord's own description of the various classes of His hearers, in the first of His great parables, and it is enough here to allude to those various classes, and to remind ourselves of the small percentage, so to speak, of good and thoroughly honest souls which our Lord there claims for Himself.

It must be remembered, also, that the preaching of Divine truth is never without its effect for good or for evil. It is what St. Paul calls either a savour of life or a savour of death.¹ It was not possible that the populations, among whom our Lord had now been preaching for more than a year, could be as they were before He

¹ 2 Cor. ii. 16.

began. We know that the preaching of St. John Baptist lasted for a shorter time than that of our Lord up to the period of which we are now speaking, and yet our Lord speaks as if that short time of the ministry of the Baptist had been enough to decide the character of the future course of those to whom that ministry was addressed. As a general rule, those who received St. John were made thereby fit to receive our Lord, while those who rejected him, as a general rule, were found among the enemies of our Lord. The people had had their time of visitation, and it was soon over, though the effects of their behaviour during those few months lasted on almost unaltered. If that was the case with the nation at large, in respect of the preaching of St. John, how much more decisive may we believe the effect of the reception or rejection of our Lord to have been on the population of Galilee! We are almost startled to find how severely our Lord, soon after this time, could speak of the terrible judgment which awaited Capharnaum, Bethsaida, Corozain, and the other places in which He had preached, and in which His mighty works of mercy had been wrought. This language of our Lord could not be the language of exaggeration. It is probable that the guilt of rejecting Him was greater, in the eyes of God, than in its description in His own reproachful words. But these words open to us the thought of the darkness, which was now setting in over so many thousands of souls, which had enjoyed the most blessed opportunities of profiting by His teaching and who had not been found worthy to retain it. It is not surprising, then, that we should find Him treating the people with comparative reserve at this time, and, indeed, it would be far more surprising if we were to see no change in His demeanour towards them, after so long a time of profitless work among them.

These considerations touch only partially the notes of difference, so carefully heaped up by St. Luke in respect of the audience on the occasion of the Sermon which he has preserved to us, as contrasted with that to which the Sermon on the Mount was delivered. The delivery of the Sermon on the Mount was an occasion almost, if not altogether, unique in the teaching of our Lord. It was delivered to a large multitude, but a multitude apparently composed of those who were already, by a sort of profession, disciples of our Lord. It is a solemn lawgiving, the assembly is like that collected in an immense church, on some great festival, and the subject-matter of the Sermon is such as to show the high perfection to which many of the hearers were undoubtedly called. Without repeating what has been said elsewhere on this part of the subject, it is enough to remark that St. Luke describes the audience collected for this Sermon on the Plain in words which convey a very different picture. He distinguishes three classes among the audience. In the first place he mentions the Apostles, who had just been nominated. They come down with our Lord from the mountain, in which their election had taken place, after He had spent the night in prayer. Next to the Apostles, St. Luke mentions a crowd of His disciples —evidently a large band of professed believers and followers, who were probably living in a kind of organized community, like the bands which followed St. Vincent Ferrer in his preaching. Besides these disciples, there is a third element in the audience, which is entirely wanting in the audience of the Sermon on the Mount. ‘A very great multitude of people from all Judea and Jerusalem, and the sea-coast, both of Tyre and Sidon.’ It cannot be supposed that St. Luke has added these features to the picture at random. They certainly mean that, besides the usual crowd of Galilean

listeners, many of whom were already faithful disciples, while others may have been wavering, in consequence of the difficulties of all kinds which threatened His teaching, there were now present a large number of strangers, partly from distant parts of the Holy Land, and partly also from the neighbouring heathen coasts of Tyre and Sidon. The Evangelist adds that these had come to hear Him, and also to be healed of their diseases. This mention of miracles, and of the crowds in search of them, is a feature which does not meet us in the audience of the Sermon on the Mount. ‘And they that were troubled with unclean spirits, were cured, and all the multitude sought to touch Him, for virtue went out from Him and healed all.’ He was to them far more of a wonder-worker and healer of diseases than a moral or religious teacher. These considerations certainly prepare us for finding some notable difference between the discourse delivered now, and the Sermon on the Mount.

The object of the Sermon seems to have been, partly the instruction of the people, perhaps also the furnishing to the Apostles a kind of model which they might remember and keep in mind when they had themselves to preach the Divine truths to a promiscuous audience. For one of the objects mentioned by the Evangelists, as having been in the mind of our Lord when He chose His Apostles, was that He might send them out to preach, though this purpose was not actually put into execution until a somewhat later period. The difference between the two discourses, which we have been led to expect from the foregoing remarks, would arise from a twofold source—from the great mixture of strangers among the crowd to whom our Lord addressed Himself on this occasion, and from the changes which had occurred in the attitude of the people in general towards

Him on account of the persecution of the Pharisees and Priests. It will be easy to trace the influence of these two causes, if we suppose the Sermon on the Mount to be a sort of store from which our Lord has on this occasion selected portions for His present purpose, leaving other and larger portions altogether aside.

The first and most striking of all the diversities between the two several discourses meets us at the very outset. Each discourse begins with a series of Beatitudes, and it seems difficult to think that the latter series is drawn up without some respect to the former. On this occasion our Lord addresses Himself in the first place to His own disciples, as if He left for the moment the other hearers to themselves. ‘He, lifting up His eyes on His disciples, said, Blessed ye poor! for yours is the Kingdom of Heaven.’ The Beatitude, by its form and by the reward which is coupled with it, reminds us of the first of the former Beatitudes. But there is a striking difference, inasmuch as in the former case the poor in spirit were declared blessed, and here it is the actually poor. The two Beatitudes which follow are, in the same way, echoes of the former Beatitudes, but with changes which make them decidedly new. ‘Blessed are ye that hunger now! for ye shall be filled. Blessed ye that weep now! for you shall laugh.’ It is not necessary to insist much on the difference between hungering and thirsting after justice, and that hunger which can be filled in the ordinary way by food, nor between the state of those who weep simply, and who shall be comforted by laughter, and the mourners of the first series of Beatitudes. The fourth of these Beatitudes is that which most accurately coincides with the Beatitude from which it is taken in the Sermon on the Mount. It is that single one of the earlier Beatitudes, which related to the external condition and treatment of the

disciples at the hands of others. It is not a state of heart or mind, not an act of virtue, but a condition depending on the action and behaviour of the world. ‘Blessed shall you be when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil for the Son of Man’s sake, be glad in that day and rejoice, for behold your reward is great in Heaven, for according to these things did their fathers unto the Prophets.’

It can hardly be necessary to insist on the very great importance of the Beatitudes which, after having been spoken of by our Lord in the Sermon on the Mount, are omitted in this Sermon. The blessings there pronounced on the poor in spirit, on the mourners, on those who hunger and thirst after justice, may be said to be very much modified and restricted in their scope by the language now used by our Lord. But the blessings on the meek, on the merciful, on the clean of heart, and on the peacemakers, are altogether omitted. And although it may be truly said that the shorter list involves the longer, it is certain that if we had no other declaration of our Lord on the subject of the Beatitudes than that which is given in this Sermon on the Plain, we should be without the light of at least one half of this glorious constellation, by which so much of the noblest Christian perfection has been guided in its following of Him.

But the diversities in these Beatitudes do not stop here. The Beatitudes of which we are now speaking are followed by a series of woes, denounced on their contraries—a feature altogether new in the recorded teaching of our Lord. These four woes correspond exactly to the four Beatitudes of this discourse, and their language leaves no doubt on the mind as to the manner in which the Beatitudes themselves are to be understood. To the poor are opposed the rich, to the hungry those

who are filled, to those who weep those who laugh now, and to the persecuted and reviled those whom men now bless. The woes have all their several punishment or curse. The rich are declared miserable, because they have their consolation, and so, it is implied, will not have it hereafter. Those who are full shall hunger by and bye, those who laugh shall mourn and weep, and the curse of those who are blessed by men is that ‘these things did their fathers unto the false prophets.’ These woes then, to which we shall presently return, show very plainly the literal sense in which the words as to poverty, fulness, and laughter, are to be taken in the Beatitudes to which they correspond.

After the Beatitudes we find a large gap in the repetition of the Sermon on the Mount which is here set forth. The Sermon on the Mount contained, in the next place to the Beatitudes, some sentences addressed to the disciples in particular, speaking of them as the salt of the earth and as the light of the world. These sentences are altogether wanting in the second discourse. Instead of continuing His address to His disciples in particular, our Lord seems to turn to the more general audience which crowded round them, a large portion of which may have been composed even of heathens from Tyre and Sidon, and He begins the second part of the Sermon with words which seem to point out the class to whom He speaks more directly. ‘But I say to you that hear.’ And it is not surprising, therefore, that the sentences in question, which occur in the Sermon on the Mount, should be wanting here. The whole section on what may be called the special justice of the Gospel is omitted, with an exception of which we shall presently speak. Nothing is said about our Lord’s mission to fulfil and not to destroy the Law. Nothing is said about the necessity of a justice greater than that of the Scribes

and Pharisees in the true disciples of Jesus Christ, and those corrections of the false interpretations of the Law, as to anger, lust, and the like, which follow, are also omitted. This involves the omission of the marvellous teaching concerning the gift which is to be left before the altar, in order that we may first be reconciled to our brother, concerning the speedy agreement with our adversary, to which is appended the passage about the prison from which we shall not issue without paying the last farthing, and that also concerning the casting out or cutting off of the right eye or the right hand, if they are to us a cause of danger. In the same way the instruction about the bill of divorce, so full of pregnant meaning as to the future legislation of our Lord on that subject, is wanting here, as well as the passage which forbids swearing and retaliation.

But it is very remarkable that when we reach this point in the Sermon on the Mount, we find ourselves once again on ground where the second Sermon, of which we are now speaking, takes up the former teaching. For now our Lord begins that part of the Sermon on the Plain which is addressed to the promiscuous multitude, and He begins it with instructions which echo the words of the Sermon on the Mount. ‘I say to you that hear, love your enemies, do good to them that hate you, bless them that curse you, and pray for them that calumniate you.’ Even the injunctions about turning the other cheek to the smiter and giving the coat to him who has taken the cloak, are here repeated, and the general principle is laid down, that we are to do to others as we would they should do to us. Then follow the arguments about the kindness and goodness of sinners to those who love them, and the like, implying that a far higher perfection is to be expected of those who follow His own teaching. And the passage

ends by the words: ‘Love ye your enemies, do good and lend, hoping nothing in return thereby, and your reward shall be great, and you shall be the sons of the Highest, for He is kind to the unthankful and the evil. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.’

The passage which follows on these instructions is also to be found in the Sermon on the Mount. But before we proceed to consider this resemblance to the former discourse, we must pause to note another most important series of omissions in the later Sermon. For, at the point which we have now reached in the former teaching, our Lord on the Mount added all those marvellous instructions about almsdeeds, fasting, and prayer, including the prayer which goes by His own name, which fill so large a place in the doctrine of that first Sermon. And not less remarkable is it that the next great section also, which contains His instructions to His disciples about laying up treasure in Heaven, about not serving two masters, about the necessity of being absolutely free from solicitude and care for the morrow, and the perfect abandonment of ourselves, as to all these matters, to the providence of the Father, are also omitted in the second Sermon. That is, as we shall presently have to observe, this Sermon omits here also that part of the Sermon on the Mount which is specially addressed to those who are to follow our Lord in perfection. But the Sermon on the Plain takes up again the former teaching at this point, where the subject of instruction is the duty of not judging and not condemning. And it is also to be added to the notable differences between these two representations of the same main doctrine to different audiences, that here again the Sermon on the Plain is actually more copious than the far longer Sermon with which we are comparing it. This instance of greater

copiousness is fully in keeping, also, with the general character of St. Luke's Gospel. 'Give and it shall be given to you, good measure, and pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall they give into your bosom, for with the same measure that you shall mete withal it shall be measured to you again.'

There is the same kind of amplification about the doctrine which next follows, that about not casting out the mote from our brother's eye while we have a beam in our own. This is introduced in the second Sermon by a similitude, as St. Luke calls it. 'Can the blind lead the blind? Do they not both fall into the ditch? The disciple is not above his master, but every one shall be perfect, if he be as his master.' And then follows the expanded passage about the mote and the beam. Then we come again to a point at which there is an omission. The passage in the first Sermon about not giving what is holy to dogs or casting pearls before swine, is wanting here. So also is the passage which follows, about the power of prayer, 'Ask and it shall be given to you,' and the rest. The image of the father who is asked by his son for bread, and will not give him a stone, in which our Lord appeals from their own paternal feelings to their children, to show how ready God must be to hear prayers, is left out, and the words also which follow about the strait gate and the narrow way.

It is at this point that we come to another remarkable feature in the new Sermon. Hitherto we have had to notice omissions and repetitions, with occasional expansions in the shorter Sermon of what had been said less fully in the longer. But now our Lord seems to take up words which belong to the Sermon on the Mount and give them a different connection from that which they had in the teaching there delivered. For

He connects some words, which are spoken there about the false prophets who are to be known by their works, with the words which immediately precede them in their new place in the Sermon on the Plain. He had last spoken of the foolishness of the blind leading the blind, of those who had their own faults uncorrected setting up to correct those of others. ‘For,’ He says: ‘There is no good tree that bringeth forth evil fruit, nor an evil tree that bringeth forth good fruit. For every tree is known by its fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor from a bramble bush do they gather the grape. A good man, out of the good treasure of his heart, bringeth forth that which is good, and an evil man, out of the evil treasure, bringeth forth that which is evil. For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.’ These last words occur elsewhere in our Lord’s teaching, but they do not form part of the Sermon on the Mount. We shall return to the subject of the change of connection with regard to the former words in the passage, when we come to speak of them in detail.

The conclusion of the Sermon on the Plain is very like indeed to the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount, but it is not identical therewith. Instead of the passage about those who call Him Lord, Lord, not all entering into the Kingdom, we have now simply the question, ‘Why call you me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?’ And the kind of parable at the end of the first Sermon about the two builders, on the sand and on the rock, is repeated, though with some little change of form. This is what an examination of the two Sermons shows us, as to the changes made by our Lord on this later occasion. We may now proceed to consider whether this comparison reveals to us anything as to the mind of our Lord in making these changes.

If, as has been supposed, the first part of the second Sermon was addressed directly to our Lord's disciples or to the Apostles themselves, it is obvious that the change in the Beatitudes is very significant. There is altogether a want of the high spiritual doctrine, the calm teaching of the great principles of perfection, which marks the opening sentences of the Sermon on the Mount. The disciples are directly addressed, instead of general principles being promulgated, which may apply to others as well as to them. Our Lord speaks of you poor, you who hunger now, you who weep now, you who are hated and your names cast out for the sake of the Son of Man. There is nothing to extend the language beyond the outward and visible condition of a band of men, devoted to the service of God, perhaps even now practising Evangelical poverty, and branded by the hatred of the world for the very fact of their external adherence to our Lord. Even that beautiful title itself of the Son of Man is new in this Sermon, for it had not been used on the former occasion. All this seems to point to the change which had really taken place in the position of our Lord, and in consequence, of His disciples also, on account of the persecution to which He and they were now exposed. And it would seem as if the presence of the other large multitude of strangers had something to do with the reticence of our Lord as to those higher points of doctrine contained in the former series of Beatitudes, as well as the omission of His language about the salt of the earth, and the rest.

But, when we remember that, after these four new Beatitudes, so different in form from the former Beatitudes, and after the entirely novel addition of the woes which are contrasted with them, our Lord turns in this discourse more exclusively to the multitude at large, it is indeed most instructive to observe the heads of

teaching which He considers adapted for them, and those which He seems to omit as unfitted for them. The allusions to the Law and to its overgrowth of human interpretations are entirely natural, as addressed to the audience of the Sermon on the Mount, and their omission is equally natural here. The same thing may be said of the instructions in the former Sermon as to the manner and intention with which the great duties of almsgiving, prayer, and fasting are to be discharged. But it is very significant that our Lord should have insisted so strongly, in this second Sermon, on the love of enemies, and the other acts of charity, on which He does insist. It may be supposed that the presence of some heathen, or at least of some very uninstructed Jews, from distant parts, who came to Him rather for the sake of His miracles, than for the sake of His spiritual doctrine, may have made Him lower the whole tone of the second Sermon to their level, even though there may have been many present to whom the higher teaching of the Sermon on the Mount might have been addressed without danger of any violation of the precept about pearls and swine. For it is almost a principle in the Evangelical ministry of preaching, that the most ignorant of the audience are to be addressed rather than the most instructed. But, as has been said, it is most significant that our Lord does not keep back the duty of the forgiveness of injuries, and the love of enemies. In truth, this, which is the central part of the second Sermon, in which so many of the points of doctrine of the Sermon on the Mount are kept back, is nevertheless that part of the whole in which our Lord has enlarged on those few points which He has selected and which are not omitted.

If, as seems the most probable conclusion to form concerning the audience whom our Lord now had in

view, these parts of the Sermon are directly addressed to those who were either scarcely informed at all about the true religion, or had but a comparatively limited knowledge thereof, we may surely learn from this selection of subjects, on which He speaks to them, how He would have the ministers of the Gospel deal with persons in similar conditions. These heathen, or half-heathen, people, were not to be reminded of the duty of alms-deeds or fasting or prayer, though these are all duties which belong to the code of natural religion, at least in principle, nor are they as yet to be instructed in simplicity of intention, in abandonment of all care of temporal things into the hands of God. But they are still to be urged with the precept of the forgiveness of injuries and the love of enemies. They are still to be told that it is better to turn the other cheek to the smiter, and to suffer injury, rather than to seek to avenge it. The great principle of doing unto others as we would have them do to us, is laid on them as a rule. And our Lord argues with them as He had argued in the Sermon on the Mount, that it could be no point at all of perfection to love those who love us, to do good to those who do good to us, and to lend to those from whom we hope to receive again. These are things which even sinners do, out of motives of self-interest, ‘But love ye your enemies, do good and lend, hoping for nothing thereby, and your reward shall be great, and you shall be the sons of the Highest, for He is kind to the unthankful, and to the evil.’ Here is the same motive, that of being the children of God, which is urged in the Sermon on the Mount. And that very highest of all the precepts there inculcated, ‘Be ye perfect, as your Father Who is in Heaven is perfect,’ is here also set forth under another form, in which the one quality of mercy is substituted for all perfection.

'Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.'

We are thus led on to see that our Lord treats even those who are not far advanced in His school—if we may not say with certainty, those who hardly know more than natural religion—as lying under the obligation of that commandment of mutual charity and brotherly love of which the Sacred Scripture speaks as having been laid on man from the very beginning. The key note of this part of the Sermon is, that we shall be dealt with in the same way as we deal with others. And this law is one of universal application, and is a law for the heathen as well as for the Jew or Christian. It extends, as we see in the following verses, to judgment and thought as well as to action, and in action it extends as far as the forgiveness of injuries. Its sanction is the decree of God, Whom all who have a conscience acknowledge as their Judge and Master, that the measure of His judgment of us shall be the measure of our judgments and dealings with one another. And He is not afraid to appeal to the instinctive sense which lies deep in the human heart, that God is a Father as well as a Master, and that He deals with us as children and expects us to behave as His children. These, then, are truths which are not to be kept for those who are to be led on to perfection only, along the high and pure path of the beatitudes and the counsels. They are not to be kept back even from those who have not as yet a firm grasp of revelation and of supernatural religion.

In this second great Sermon, then, we have, as has been hinted already, our Lord giving us His own perfect example in the method which should be followed in the adaptation of the same system of Divine truths and doctrines to an audience different in many respects from one to which they have been already once delivered.

We have Him acting with great delicacy and reserve, in keeping back from some who were not fit to receive them, the more exquisite and lofty truths regarding Christian perfection, which He had so freely and so confidently communicated to others. We have Him, in the second place, adding, in the four Woes, the motive of fear to the motive of hope which He had used in the first Sermon. We have Him selecting, according to His Divine prudence and knowledge of mankind, certain doctrines, out of a great chain, and leaving others untouched. We have Him expanding the points which He selected, at the same time that He entirely omitted others. We find Him also setting an example of that very fruitful, but at the same time difficult, method of instruction, in which one class of persons is addressed in the presence of another class, with a view to the benefit of both, as is done, for instance, in all public catechizing. It is, therefore, entirely contrary to the facts of the case to regard this Sermon as a summary of the former Sermon. We find our Lord ever changing the connection and selection of some of the matter which He repeats, while at the same time He freely repeats other points in words almost identical with those which He had used before. This, therefore, is a great and a fresh gain for all those who have to follow Him and His Apostles in the application of the same Divine truths, time after time, to different audiences.

CHAPTER VI.

The Blessings and the Woes.

St. Luke vii. 20—26; *Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 47.

FROM the general consideration of the lessons which may be gathered from a comparison of the two great Sermons of our Lord which are preserved for us by the Evangelists, we may proceed now to a more particular examination of that with which we are more immediately concerned, the Sermon on the Plain. It will be found that we shall by no means do our duty, in contemplating these Divine words of our Lord, if we simply consider them as repetitions of the lessons already delivered in the former Sermon, and that we shall be abundantly repaid if we study them by themselves, in the light of the knowledge, furnished us by the Evangelist who records them, concerning the occasion and the audience to which our Lord was addressing himself.

St. Luke gives us in a very few touches almost a complete picture of the scene which met the eye at the time of this great teaching of our Lord. The mixed multitude is thronging round our Lord, striving, in their eagerness to obtain some miraculous favour, to touch Him. They are anticipating the faith of the woman of whom we shall soon have to speak, who came behind Him, as He was passing through the street of Capharnaum on the way to the house of Jairus, the ruler of the synagogue, and who said to herself that if she could but

touch the hem of His garment, she should be healed. It is difficult to imagine how our Lord could have freed Himself from their importunities so as to have the opportunity of preaching to them, but it is likely that with Him, as with some of the great wonder-workers among His Saints in later times, the people were more or less accustomed to some order of time, so that it was easy to arrange them and quiet them for the purposes of the discourse. Or we may, perhaps, suppose that here, as on other occasions of which we have record, He healed every one of those who came to Him for cure, and then began His Sermon. ‘Virtue,’ says the Evangelist, ‘went forth from Him and healed them all.’ It was His will to allow His powers of healing to flow forth on all who touched Him, even without His usual solemn action of laying His hands upon them. Thus they were prepared for the Divine teaching, which was as much more important to them than His miraculous powers of healing, as the soul is more valuable than the body. It would seem, also, that there were ranks in which the audience were arranged, at least that the disciples were separated from the others. And then, in the silence which fell on that lately noisy and eager crowd, struggling with each other, who should get near to Him first, and each one pleading his own cause, or the cause of the sick friend or relative whom he had brought for relief of bodily ailment or misery, our Lord began to speak. St. Luke tells us that He lifted up His eyes on His disciples, for it was our Lord’s wont to keep His eyes modestly down, and yet He laid aside the demeanour of perfect and most humble recollection when He was to preach, for in preaching He probably sanctioned in Himself the practice of His servants, who have followed Him in that high duty, and made His whole attitude and all His gestures and looks serve to enforce the teaching on which He

was engaged. We are told more than once, that His manner of preaching was such as to leave Him in a state of great physical exhaustion. He spoke first, of and to His disciples, that is, He addressed them in such a way as to instruct the others by means of His words to them.

'Blessed ye poor, for yours is the Kingdom of Heaven.' Although the reward here spoken of is the same as that of the first and last of the former Beatitudes, yet the Beatitude is certainly not the same. The words in the original are not 'ye poor,' but 'the poor,' but the limitation or definition of the poverty which is blessed, as that which was practised by the disciples, is conveyed in the fact that our Lord looked to them as He was speaking, and also in the form of the other blessings, which are directly addressed to them. It is therefore actual poverty which is here declared by our Lord to be blessed, as afterwards He blesses actual weeping and actual hunger. But it is not all actual poverty which has this blessing, for to say that would be to challenge the Providence of God, by which it is that there are diversities of conditions in human society, and that salvation and perfection can be gained in all, as in all it is also possible to lose the soul. It is our Lord's own doctrine in the great parable of the Husbandmen in the Vineyard, that the greatest rewards in the next world are not connected, by any invariable rule, with even the highest religious privileges and opportunities in this world. Thus, though, as we shall presently see, the state of actual poverty is in itself a blessed state, inasmuch as it gives the soul many opportunities and even facilities for virtue, which are not to be found, as an ordinary rule, among the rich, still it is not all actual poverty, but actual poverty with certain dispositions, which inherits the great blessing here promulgated. It is the actual poverty as practised now by the Apostles and some

others of the disciples, that is, actual poverty conjoined with poverty of spirit, which has the Kingdom of Heaven. It may, or not, be the case, as some interpreters have maintained, that the little community of the Apostles was now formed by our Lord into a small religious body, and that the Apostles were bound, as by vow, to the practice of the counsels, of which this of poverty is the first. But, at all events, it must be understood that the Apostles were not only actually poor, but poor in spirit also, as well as not only poor in spirit, but actually poor also. The poverty, then, which is here spoken of is that actual poverty which is united to the spirit of poverty, whether it be in the so-called religious state, or outside it. And this poverty has a blessing of its own. Nor can the true doctrine about Christian poverty be understood fully, unless this blessing is taken into account. A few considerations will show us this truth.

In the first place, it is a better thing to be poor both in spirit and actually, than in spirit only. For this doctrine was laid down by our Lord when He said, ‘If thou wilt be perfect, go sell what thou hast and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in Heaven and come follow me.’¹ It is not inconsistent with this, that there may be many more perfect souls in the state of spiritual poverty, than others who are found in actual poverty. The question is of the two conditions in themselves. The actually poor whose dispositions are such as are here spoken of, do something more than forsake all things in spirit. They forsake all things both in spirit and in deed. They have therefore all that the others have, and something else besides.

In the next place, actual poverty is a great help towards gaining the perfection of poverty of spirit, as actual

¹ St. Matt. xix. 21.

mortification is a great help towards gaining mortification of the interior man, and as humiliation is a great advantage in the pursuit of humility. Thus, if for no other reason, actual poverty would be valuable, because it paves the way to the spirit of poverty, which is the subject of the first Beatitude.

Again, actual poverty is a great help to that perfect abandonment of all care and that absolute dependence upon God, which are so strongly recommended by our Lord in the Sermon on the Mount. It makes it easy to trust ourselves to Him Who feeds the birds of the air and clothes with beauty the flowers of the field, and in consequence, makes those who have it ready to depend on God as their Father, and to leave themselves to His care. Thus it brings down on them the blessings of being actually cared for by Him in a marvellous way, so that they have experience of His Fatherhood towards them which others have not, and this breeds in them joy and courage in His service, which make them fit to receive still greater favours at His hands, and to be entrusted with great commissions for His service. Such persons have a knowledge of the goodness of God, of the infinity of His bounties and the delicacy of His care over those who belong to Him, which is wanting in others who have not so entirely deprived themselves of all other resources but those of His Providence, and in consequence of this knowledge, they are ready to look to Him for assistance in the future, when they are to start on any new work for His glory, with all the confidence and security of the angels themselves. Thus it is a matter of history in the Church, that these persons have been those who have wrought the greatest things for Him. On the other hand, the presence of possessions, even when there is poverty of spirit, cannot but be a burthen and a danger. And in many cases, as we see

in the rich young man, who had kept the Commandments of God from his youth up, they constitute just that one tie which prevents the perfect fidelity of a soul which is called to some high vocation. This is very much the case when the service of God requires danger, exposure to the loss of worldly position, dishonour in the eyes of men, and the like. Property is so mixed up with all the other kinds of earthly goods, that its possession cannot but be a snare to many souls, while to many others it is an impediment which has to be conquered with difficulty, according to that saying of our Lord, that it is difficult for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.

The condition of the disciples, as they now were gathered into a small community by our Lord, was undoubtedly one of poverty, but it had also other features which were still more uninviting to human judgment. It is not always the lot of the poor to be absolutely destitute, and we have already seen that the disciples had been fain to pluck the ears of corn as they passed through the fields, and rub them in their hands that they might satisfy the cravings of actual hunger. On the occasion of which we are speaking, it seems probable that they had spent the night like our Lord in prayer, and had been occupied since morning in arranging and assisting the crowds, who had come to Him to be healed. At all events, hunger, actual hunger, the fruit of poverty stretched even to destitution, was no uncommon lot in their lives. Our Lord takes this feature also and pronounces on it His Divine Blessing, fruitful of grace and merit. ‘Blessed are you who hunger now, for you shall be filled.’ Here again we touch a new subject of benediction. The practice of abstinence, from which human nature shrinks, even in those who are desirous of advancing in the service of God, is now set forth by our

Lord as worthy of special commendation, at a time when He said so few things of this sort to the people. If this is so, it may well be worth our while to remind ourselves of the praises which the Fathers have heaped, as it were, on this holy practice, besides, setting us the example which modern delicacy is so afraid to follow. The occasion on which they speak of this virtue is often that of the temptation and fasting of our Lord. St. Cyprian, for example, tells us that abstinence empties the sink of vice, dries up petulance, makes the concupiscences languish, and drives false pleasure to flight. Etna, he says, is extinguished and does not any longer set the neighbouring mountains on fire. He speaks, of course, of the volcano of concupiscence. He says that if fasting be discreetly managed, it subdues the rebellion of the flesh and disarms the tyranny of gluttony. It shuts out disorderly movements, it binds up wandering appetites. If it be united with humility, it makes the servants of God despisers of the world. It is fed on the delightful pastures of Sacred Scripture, it is refreshed by contemplation, it is made strong by grace, it is nourished with heavenly food. And he goes on to quote the instance of Daniel, and the three holy children, of Moses and of Elias.²

The condition of the disciples was still further one of affliction. The enmity of the world, and their own poverty and labouring life, made them appear persons from whose existence all joy was banished. It is this characteristic of their condition on which our Lord fastens, in the next place, to declare that this too has its own peculiar blessing. ‘Blessed you that weep now, for you shall laugh.’ It is probable as has been said, that it is this simple material affliction, borne in the spirit and manner in which it was borne in the school of our Lord,

² St. Cypr. *Serm. de jejunio et tentatione Christi.*

that He here speaks of as blessed. The spiritual mourning, such as that for sin, our own or that of others, for the miseries of the world, the offence against God of which it is so full, for the danger of souls, the difficulties of salvation, the scandals of the Church, the delay of the possession of God, all that kind of mourning is made the subject of the Beatitude in the Sermon on the Mount. The Greek word in the passage before us is the simple word which signifies weeping. All the external afflictions, affecting either the body as in sickness and bad health, or the material condition, as in the case of bereavement, loss of friends or fortune and the like, fall under the head of this blessing. Our Lord does not pass even this common condition by, but gives it His benediction. It fills up the list, so to speak, of the external conditions of Beatitude, with which He is here concerned.

The doctrine of this passage is, that these external ills of which men are so much afraid, poverty, hunger, and misery, are connected in the good Providence of His Father, Who has arranged the order of the world and allowed their existence as elements of our present state of probation, with distinct blessings of their own. In the former sermon our Lord had spoken of spiritual conditions; now He leaves these, in order to dwell on the material evils of human life, as they are commonly considered. This is not to deny the truth of those sayings of the Fathers, St. Ambrose, for instance, in which it is laid down that the two lists of the Beatitudes come of the same thing, or mutually contain each other. For, as Toletus teaches us, the man who of his own free will practises exterior poverty will easily acquire the poverty of the spirit of the first Beatitude, and will easily be meek and peaceful, for riches are the great obstacle to meekness and peacefulness. Again,

those who weep and are afflicted, in the sense here spoken of, will easily be men of mercy to others, and those who hunger and fast are well on their way to obtain purity of heart as well as of body. The same writer tells us that the three qualities here blessed by our Lord seem to have been selected by Him as the contraries of the three great mischiefs of the world, of which St. John speaks in his first epistle, the concupiscence of the eyes, and the concupiscence of the flesh, and the pride of life. For poverty cuts down the pride of life, hunger, which is the fruit of indigence, cuts away the concupiscence of the eyes, and weeping puts an end to the concupiscence of the flesh.

It would seem to be our Lord's purpose in this discourse, as far as it relates especially to His disciples, to meet every difficulty which belonged to the condition in which they now found themselves, and to show how it was, in truth, a great blessing. It might seem as if the catalogue of possible evils, to which their condition was liable, had now been fully told out, for the great natural and material evils may all be summed up in poverty, hunger, and affliction. But it was not so, there was yet another element of suffering, which was to fill a large place in the life of the disciples, as in His own, and this element, again, was to be shown to have its special and great blessing. This element came from the persecutions to which they and He, they for His sake and because they belonged to Him, were now exposed from the Jews, and which were to grow ever more fierce and unscrupulous, both in His case and in theirs, ending in His own death and in the utter proscription of the Apostles and all who followed them. To a devout Jew this must have been the severest part of the trial of those who followed our Lord. It may easily be imagined that poverty, and fasting, and humiliation, and affliction, may have been

easily borne, by men whose hearts were touched by Divine love and the zeal for souls. In all ages of the chosen people, there had been men who had voluntarily adopted for the love of God what would now be called the ascetic or eremitical life. But the affections of the Jewish people, in proportion as they were more devout and religious in character, centred around the Temple of God and its solemn services and sacrifices, and such persons were taught from their infancy to venerate the priests of the altar, and the pontiffs whose lips kept knowledge. It was the severest of trials to a good Jew to be threatened with expulsion from the synagogue.

The excommunications of the Jewish Synagogue had a temporal aspect as well as a spiritual aspect, and, even as to the interests of this world, it was a great loss for poor men to be deprived of all share in the copious alms which were sent to Jerusalem, year after year, by the Jews scattered all over the Empire which was first that of the Greeks and then that of the Romans. But the temporal loss could more easily be borne than the disgrace of exclusion from the commonwealth, as St. Paul calls it, of Israel, and to have their names become by-words as the names of persons hostile to the people and religion of the true God. And yet this was just the crowning form of persecution which was awaiting the disciples, if it had not already fallen upon them. ‘Blessed shall you be when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil for the Son of Man’s sake.’ The words are very much an echo of those in the Sermon on the Mount, though in this place the insertion of the word ‘separate,’ gives a more technical turn to the sentence, which, in the former Sermon, did not directly allude

to the sentence of excommunication. The language of our Lord here seems to represent a kind of persecution which gradually reached its climax. First men are to hate the Apostles and disciples for the sake of the Son of Man, because they profess belief in Him, and teach His doctrine and follow His example of strict observance of the moral law and of the utmost purity and humility of life. Then they are to go on to putting them out of the synagogues, as persons who have apostatized from the religion of their fathers. This is to be accompanied and followed by personal insults and reproaches of all kinds heaped upon the disciples, and lastly, behind their backs their very name is to be cast out as an evil thing, as is the case with the names of heretics, great criminals, the authors of false sects, and the like. All this was to await the disciples for their adherence to our Lord.

It might have been thought that He would at least have comforted them, but He does much more. He does not simply promise them a reward, as in the case of the other blessings in this Sermon, the reward, for instance, of being filled, and of laughing, in their turn, after their hunger and their thirst. He tells them they shall be blessed then, and He gives a still further instruction, before He adds why they are so blessed. ‘Be glad in that day and rejoice, for behold, your reward is great in Heaven.’ They are to be glad and exult internally, and even to show their joy externally, for this seems to be the meaning of exultation, for the suffering is small indeed, in comparison to the reward, any reward of the next life being indefinitely greater and beyond all proportion to any pain of this life. Even here patience goes far to being its own reward, but the reward of all this slight patience is very great indeed, and it is already ours, and it is in Heaven where nothing can be lost or

pass away. It may be true, as has said by some commentators, that our Lord here animates the disciples by the hope of reward, and gives the existence of so great a reward in Heaven as the reason for their joy and exultation. For such motives are not to be excluded, and none has used them more frequently and constantly than our Lord Himself, for the reason perhaps, among others, that He knew the wonderful riches of His Father's magnificence and the beauties and glories of His Father's house, better than any of the saints could know them. And we find that this motive of the reward which God has prepared for them who love Him, leads persons who are affected by it, to the still higher motive of the pure love of God. For these same Apostles, soon after the day of Pentecost, were scourged in the Temple by the order of the Chief Priests for preaching in the name of our Lord, and then it is said of them that they went forth from the 'presence of the Council, rejoicing that they were accounted worthy to suffer reproach for the name of Jesus,'³ thus fulfilling to the letter this command of our Lord, which bade them rejoice at the time of their suffering, and at the same time showing that their joy came rather from the dignity itself of suffering for the sake of Jesus Christ, than from the hope of the great reward in Heaven promised to them by God.

Our Lord gives the disciples the same reason in this place for their joy under persecution, as in the Sermon on the Mount. 'For according to these things did their fathers unto the prophets.' Later on in His ministry, He was to tell them that they were to be treated by the world, and even by the chosen people of God, as He Himself had been treated. The disciple was not to be above his Master. If they called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more those

³ Acts v. 41.

of his household? But at the present stage of the Gospel history the persecution against Himself had not reached its utmost fury, at least externally. The instances of the old Prophets, therefore, were more apposite to the purpose of illustration for the present. The prophets had been the undoubted emissaries of God, and, after they had been ill treated by the generation to which their warnings had been addressed, they had been held in honour and veneration by the children of that very generation. It is one of His reproaches of the Pharisees, as we shall see, that their fathers killed the Prophets, and they built their sepulchres.⁴ Thus the example of the Prophets had a double consolation contained in it. In the first place, it was a great consolation to be on the side of God, as the Prophets had been, and in the second place, it was a consolation to know that, however their preaching might be treated by the generation to which it was directly and immediately addressed, it would in the end be acknowledged as the message of God.

It must be remembered, before we pass on, that this definite blessing pronounced by our Lord on those who are calumniated and reviled and spoken against is not the only definite blessing contained in this context. We have hitherto spoken simply of the blessing of poverty, of hungering, of weeping now, but our Lord gives a special blessing for each of these states, corresponding to the state itself. The poor have the Kingdom of Heaven. This is to be understood, not only of the spiritual poverty of which He said the same thing in the Sermon on the Mount, but also of actual poverty, of which He is here speaking, which has the Kingdom of Heaven for many good reasons. In the first place, those who have nothing are under the special care and protection of the King of

⁴ St. Matt. xxiii. 29.

Heaven ; they belong to those classes of His creatures for whom He is more especially bound, so to say, to provide, as their Creator, and who are in more immediate dependence on Him than those who are provided for by having abundant means belonging to themselves. In every kingdom those have a greater share for whom the King Himself thus provides. They belong to the Kingdom of Heaven like the holy angels, who have nothing of their own, nor desire anything, or like the fowls of the air and the flowers of the field, for which God cares. Again, the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to the poor, on account of their detachment from all else, their freedom from anxiety and solicitude for temporal matters, which leaves their hearts free to rise up to the throne of God and to feed their desires upon the true goods which are eternal. Again, as actual poverty makes spiritual poverty easy, it opens to those who practise it the treasury of the spiritual Kingdom, the gifts and graces with which God is ever ready to adorn the souls which do not, as it were, paralyze the hand of His bounty by their grovelling attachments, and the many sins or imperfections which the cares of this world beget. Again, as by the Kingdom of Heaven is sometimes meant the Gospel message, and the calls which it makes on obedience and loyalty, these can address themselves without hindrance to the souls which are not overclouded by the mists raised by the possession of the good things of this world. Faith is the atmosphere in which the poor live, and in this way such souls become capable of great spiritual fruitfulness, of great purity of intention, of singleness of purpose, of courage and constancy in the work which they undertake for God. It is more easy for them than for others to recognize the hand of God in the daily incidents of life, and to make their own ventures in His service with the most perfect

and joyous simplicity. Thus the whole world is to them the Kingdom of God, and His interests are easily made paramount over all others.

Another, and perhaps the greatest reason, for the possession of the Kingdom of Heaven by the poor, is that which in another place is expressed in the words of our Lord, ‘Fear not, little flock, for it hath pleased your Father to give you the Kingdom.’⁵ The passage in which these words occur belongs to a later time of the preaching of our Lord, and He is there speaking to His disciples in the presence of a very large multitude. So far the conditions of time and circumstances are like those of the present Sermon, and it is remarkable that on that occasion our Lord introduced many portions of teaching from the Sermon on the Mount which are omitted in this Sermon on the Plain. He puts the confidence and fearlessness about temporal matters which He requires of His followers on the good pleasure or choice of the Father, just as in other places He is reported as giving thanks to His Father because He has chosen little ones and uninstructed ones for the reception of the truths of His Gospel. ‘I confess to Thee, Father, Lord of Heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent and hast revealed them to little ones. Yea, Father, for so it hath seemed good in Thy sight.’⁶ And there is an echo of this teaching of our Lord with regard to the poor in the Epistle of St. James, the book of all others in the New Testament which is most like the utterances of our Lord in the Gospel. St. James says, ‘Hearken, my dearest brethren, hath not God chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith, and heirs of the Kingdom which God hath promised to them that love Him?’⁷ Our Lord constantly

⁵ St. Luke xii. 32.

⁶ St. Matt. xi. 25, 26.

⁷ St. James iii. 5.

tells us that God is free in His choices and in the distribution of His gifts, and with this royal freedom He has chosen to give His Kingdom to the poor, as He chose men rather than angels in the Incarnation, Jacob rather than Esau, David rather than his elder brethren, and the like.

The blessing of the hungry, which is the next in this catalogue of Beatitudes, is that those who are thus afflicted, or who afflict themselves thus, shall be filled. The blessing of those who weep now is that they shall laugh. This doctrine implies that hunger, sorrow, the afflictions of this world in body and in estate, are blessings in the intention of God, and, to those who bear them and use them as He intends them to be borne and used, they give opportunities of virtue, and exclude many occasions of sin and worldliness into which those who are unused to them fall very easily. They must be borne with in the spirit of faith and resignation, or they must be voluntarily courted and embraced out of the love of God, in order that they may be thus prolific of good, but they have these blessings attached to them, which are not attached to the contrary states and conditions. The blessings which are allotted to them are just those spiritual goods which correspond to the temporal goods, which are foregone by those in whom these qualities are found. Thus it is natural that the blessing on hunger should be fulness, and that the blessing on weeping should be joy and laughter. These foolish, childish, and even animal indulgences, which are foregone by those who hunger, fast, mourn, weep, who choose the life of penance and severity which is here commended, are the false shadows of the goods in the eternal kingdom which are rightly described by the names of fulness and laughter. The fulness which will be the reward in the heavenly Kingdom cannot be the

mere satiety of the natural appetite for food which we have in common with the lower animals, but it will be the perfect and unending satisfaction of the noble appetites of the new creature, glorified both in soul and body in the presence of God, which our Lord constantly describes, in His parables and other teaching, under the figure of a banquet, not simply because such an image may convey the highest idea of enjoyment to ordinary minds, but because there is something, in the supernatural life of the Blessed, which answers in a higher order to the figure itself which is used. And, with regard to the second part of the promise, that which relates to the joy which shall be the reward of a life of weeping and affliction, even on earth it is certain that there is no mirth or happiness like that of the true penitent, of those who deal most hardly with themselves and welcome all sorts of affliction as their lot here in union with the Cross of our Lord. The soul which is at peace with God, and which feeds itself on the hope of seeing His face in Heaven, has that perpetual sunshine upon it which puts into the shade all the brightness and delight of even the most innocent natural happiness, and, much more, the delights of the sensual, the vicious, and the worldly, which are excitements rather than pleasures. Joyousness is the characteristic of the true Christian life and the true Christian society, and if there is so much, even here and now, of this intense happiness, it is easy to see that it will be multiplied and deepened a thousandfold in the eternal possession of God, in the companionship of the Saints and Angels. And the language of our Lord may also be understood as being just what it is, on account of His desire that we should remember that there is an exact reward and retribution, in the Kingdom of His Father, for every kind of suffering endured for His sake, as well as for every kind

of false and wicked enjoyment of which His enemies are guilty.

These four blessings, which had been addressed by our Lord to His disciples in the presence of the crowd, making them, as it were, serve Him for a text from which to preach the truth concerning the things which, in the estimation of the world were ordinarily held to be the chief of external evils, were followed by four contrary declarations as to the opposites of these supposed evils, as to which also He proclaims the Gospel truth. He preserves the form of direct address, although it may not be considered certain that among the crowd to whom He was speaking there were many who were rich and the like. But the principle of the estimation of riches, of pleasures, of good cheer and abundance of enjoyment, and of the desirableness of human applause and popularity, lay deeply ingrained in the minds and hearts of numbers in that as in any other multitude. ‘But woe to you that are rich, for you have received your consolation. Woe unto you that are filled, for you shall hunger. Woe to you that now laugh, for you shall mourn and weep. Woe to you when men shall bless you, for according to these things did their fathers to the false prophets.’

The word woe may signify an imprecation or a simple denunciation. It may be the language of one who desires and prays that evil may befall those of whom he speaks, or it may be the language of one who only foresees their case and deplores it, or at least warns them of it. It is in accordance with the general character of this discourse of our Lord to consider the word here as a simple prediction, or even as expressing sympathy and compassion. The best commentary on this first woe may be found in our Lord’s own parable or apostrophe or history—for it is not certain that He is not relating

an actual history—which we know as the Parable of the Rich Glutton. For in that parable the words which are put into the mouth of Abraham, in his answer to the request of the rich man for relief, are very like the reason given by our Lord for the woe of which He speaks in this place. ‘Son, remember that thou didst receive good things in thy lifetime, and likewise Lazarus evil things, but now he is comforted and thou art tormented.’⁸

It is not the doctrine of Sacred Scripture that the rich will be tormented, simply for having been rich, if they have used their riches in the right way, as the rich glutton had not used his. But it is the doctrine of Scripture, that riches are most dangerous to those who possess them, just for the reason that they nurture pride and blindness of heart, because they are, as our Lord calls them, so deceitful and deluding, and make their possessors consider them as their own, to be used for their own enjoyment and profit. ‘For they that will become rich,’ says the Apostle, ‘fall into temptation, and into the snare of the devil, and into many unprofitable and hurtful desires, which drown men into destruction and perdition, for the desire of money is the root of all evil.’⁹ Even the simple enjoyment of riches —like that of the rich glutton, of whom we are told no positively bad thing, but only that he neglected to do the charity for which God gave him the occasion—has a tendency to make people take an altogether false view of the world in which their lot is cast, only for the time of their probation. Such people forget the need of penance and of prayer, of laying up the treasure in Heaven, and of aiming at the things which are eternal. It is not denied by our Lord that the enjoyment of riches involves a kind of happiness, as men reckon it,

⁸ St. Luke xvi. 25.

⁹ 1 Tim. vi. 9.

for it makes them masters of a great many pleasures and indulgences, and delivers them from the anxiety for food and raiment, which presses hardly on others, especially if they have not the light of faith and the habit of reliance of God. This may be the consolation of which He speaks. It is what they have desired and it is given them. It may also be remembered that all men do some good things in their life, for which God, in His infinite justice, does not leave them unrewarded. As they are not meritorious of an eternal reward, He gives them a temporal. There are many instances of this in Sacred Scripture, as in the Egyptian midwives, who spared the children of the Israelites, contrary to the command of Pharaoh. And this is often the true interpretation of the apparent prosperity of those who are not on the side of God or the Church, but have a certain amount of natural virtue which leads them to be honest, or generous, or clement, or liberal in giving, or temperate, or truthful, and so with other excellent qualities which may yet be in the natural order only. Such actions and characters have their consolation in temporal prosperity, or good fame, or power, or success in their enterprises, in long life and numbers of children, and security in their possessions. But all these things come to an end with this life, and, in the next world, it may be found of such persons that they have had their consolation and that no more awaits them at the hand of God.

‘Woe to you that are filled, for you shall hunger, woe to you that now laugh, for you shall mourn and weep.’ Our Lord is still speaking of the literal fulness and laughter, which answer as their opposites to the hunger and weeping of the disciples. And the reason for the woe is the same as in the case of the rich, or rather, it is something more positive. For in the case of the rich

it is only implied, though not said, that having had their prosperity and consolation in this life, they will find themselves, in the next world, in a miserable state of penury and destitution, from which there is no escape and no relief. But in the case of the full and those who laugh, the actual contrary to their state in this world is given as the reason for the woe. It is the belief of theologians that the punishments of the next world will be most accurately proportioned and arranged, according to the false enjoyments and indulgences which have been the portion of those who are punished, and that when our Lord, in the parable already referred to, speaks of the glutton as suffering especially from thirst, He signifies that in that very way in which he had offended God, in that he was punished. According to this doctrine, each class of sin, and every individual sin of each class, has its own particular torment, corresponding to it. And it is in accordance with this truth that the punishment of the full should be eternal and unsatisfied hunger, and the punishment of the foolish and wicked laughter, of which we must suppose our Lord to speak, should be unending grief of heart and external weeping.

In all these woes it is to be remembered that our Lord is speaking of the external contraries to those things in the disciples which He had been pronouncing blessed. He speaks, therefore, of the general tendency and result of the possession of riches, of the habit of ample enjoyment in food and drink, and of the light-hearted silly life of those who pass through the world laughing and making merry. He does not absolutely condemn either the possession of wealth, or the enjoyments of the table which do not exceed temperance, or any happy, innocent, simple laughter, though He is never said to have laughed Himself. For to condemn

these things absolutely would be to condemn every act of them, whereas what is so dangerous in them is the habit of giving the heart to the poor and empty goods of this life, and forgetting, in the enjoyment of merely natural delights, the great truths of our condition and our duties here. All through the comparison there runs this thought, which is only expressed once or twice by the use of the word ‘Now.’ It is in the resting in temporal things, as our true end, and as the true goods, that the danger lies, and the deception, which our Lord is anxious to dissipate, consists. The disciples, in their mortified and humble life, in the austeries which they practised, in their poverty and hunger, were apostles of the truth as to all these things, as well as teachers of the particular doctrines in which the Gospel message more immediately consisted. It was their fearless preaching, by word and example, of the truth as to this point, that made them unpopular and brought on them persecution, as much as their being the Apostles of Jesus Christ as the Son of God and the promised Redeemer of the world.

This must be held in mind when we consider, in the last place, the conclusion of this series of woes, which corresponds so exactly to the blessings with which this Sermon on the Plain opens. ‘Woe to you when men shall bless you, and speak well of you,’ for that seems to be the meaning of this woe, which answers in one single word to the various elements of opposition which are expressed in the corresponding blessing, ‘When men shall hate you, and separate you, and reproach you, and cast out your name as evil for the Son of Man’s sake.’ Woe to you, when men shall in this sense bless you, ‘For according to these things did their fathers to the false prophets.’ The preaching of the truth and the preaching of the doctrine of mortification and of

the emptiness of worldly goods must ever be unpopular, and it will always be a test of the true preaching and the true doctrine that they will be hated and reviled. Thus St. Paul says : ‘ If I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ.’¹⁰ The applause of the world will always be given to that which is on the side of the world, and never more so than when the preachers, who ought to set forth the truth, are content to buy praise and popularity for themselves, at the expense of a compromise of the truth and the severity of the Christian doctrine. The false prophets, of whom our Lord speaks, have left little mark behind them in the history of the chosen people. Here and there we come on traces of them, as in the history of Elias, and Achab, and Jeremias, but for the most part their names have sunk into oblivion, as was only likely to be the case. But each age has its false prophets, whether as to matters of pure doctrine, as in the case of the teachers of heresy, or as to matters of conduct, as is always the case not only with heretics—who may assume a mask of strictness for a time, but whose doctrine is sure in the end to lead to laxity, either by actual relaxation of the Divine law, or by forcing men to despair and recklessness by representing God falsely—but with those among orthodox preachers of whom the world will speak well, because their preaching tickles its ears with fine language and a display of learning, without touching the heart or probing the wounds of the conscience.

¹⁰ Galat. i. 10.

CHAPTER VII.

The Precept of Charity.

St. Luke vi. 27—38 ; *Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 48.

THE passage of the Sermon on the Plain on which we have been hitherto commenting was addressed by our Lord, in the first instance, to His own disciples, though He spoke in the presence of the multitude collected from all parts, not only of the Holy Land, but even of the neighbouring Pagan regions of Tyre and Sidon. That is, He spoke to the disciples in such a way as to make His address to them convey instruction to the others. Here again we have His example in a method of teaching which is constantly in use in the Church. For it is often the duty of His ministers to catechize children publicly, in which case the instruction given is frequently quite as valuable to those who listen, the parents and others, as to the children themselves. And again, in cases such as that of the clothing or professing of religious persons, in the presence of an audience of friends or others, it is constantly the aim of the preacher so to speak directly to those religious persons, as to instruct and move indirectly those who are witnesses to the ceremony, but who take no part in in it.

It appears, then, that after uttering the blessings and woes of which we have just now spoken, our Lord turned more directly to the multitude, and addressed Himself to them. He does not altogether change the subject of His instruction, for He has been speaking of the misery

of being highly praised and well thought of, as the false prophets were held in false honour by their contemporaries, and this declaration of the wretchedness of human popularity in their case was a sequel in His discourse to the words in which He had spoken of the blessedness of the state of the disciples under persecution of every kind. Thus the subject of the treatment which men receive from those who are in any sense their enemies is already before the minds of the audience in this place. Our Lord passes on from this to the kindred subject of the manner in which the scholars in His Divine school are to deal with those who illtreat them. This furnishes a natural link of thought between this part of the Sermon and that which has preceded it. It is as if He had said to the multitude, 'You have heard me enjoin on My own servants and friends that they are to consider themselves blessed when they are illtreated for the sake of Me, because in this their lot in the world is like that of the ancient prophets who were so dear to God. It may not be given to every one to have in this respect the crown of the prophets, but every one may nevertheless make immense profit to his own soul out of illtreatment of any kind, even that which is not inflicted on him for the sake of faith, virtue, or religion. In this sense the precept or the counsel which I have given to these My friends may be extended to all of you, if you will only deal with your enemies and others who illtreat you in the manner which I now say. I say, therefore, to you also, all of you who hear, "Love your enemies," and the rest.'

We have already spoken of several omissions which are now made by our Lord, in the series of subjects which He selects for this discourse, if it be compared with the Sermon on the Mount, of which it may be considered an adaptation, made with reference to the spiritual and

moral condition of the audience to which He now had to address His teaching. Not only does He now leave unsaid all that the Sermon on the Mount contains as to the work of His disciples as the light of the world and the salt of the earth, but He passes over also all that He then said about the necessity of the justice higher and deeper than that of the Scribes and Pharisees, and almost all the corrections of the common glosses on the Divine law which had become current among the Jews of His time. He says nothing about the sinfulness of anger, or the lustful look, of the necessity of cutting off the occasions of sin, nothing of His explanation of the law of marriage and divorce, nothing of His teaching about swearing. At last He takes up the former teaching at the point where it had touched on the sinfulness of retaliation, and on the false gloss which added, to the Divine precept of the love of neighbours, the entirely human complement of the hatred of enemies. He does not introduce this subject, as in the former Sermon, with a reference to the interpretations of the law which He is there correcting, but He brings it in absolutely as a precept of His own. Nor is there any point of perfection as to this matter laid down in the Sermon on the Mount, which is not insisted on in this Sermon on the Plain.

It cannot certainly be supposed that our Lord did not think the precepts which were thus passed over to be of the highest importance for those to whom He was now speaking. They represented, as has often been said, the mass of men, rather than the crowd of disciples already more or less familiar with His teaching. They represented persons who have been living with but little more than the natural law and the rule of conscience to guide them, and who are approaching the Church with the desire to become her children. In such persons there is often a great ignorance, which has to be corrected, as to what are

called the secondary conclusions from the law of nature and they have often far lower notions about the law of purity, or the law which forbids the excess of anger, and the like, than are required by our Lord in His kingdom. And yet our Lord seems to tell us, by the arrangement of this Sermon on the Plain, that they are capable of being urged to the high precepts of charity which now follow, and that it is well to present to them, even in the first instance, this part of the Christian code. It is in the same spirit, perhaps, that Daniel recommends to Nabuchodonosor¹ to redeem his sins with alms deeds. We find that the individual heathens who are mentioned in the New Testament as the subjects of signal favours from our Lord, such as the Centurion at Capharnaum, or Cornelius the first gentile convert, in the Acts, have been already led to honour God by alms-deeds. The precept of our Lord in this place goes, indeed, far beyond that of almsgiving, but it is still in the same line and subject matter, and both have the advantage that they can be addressed to, and understood by, persons who are on their way to the faith and to the Church, as well as those who are already citizens of the Christian Kingdom. It seems as if this precept of charity were here urged by our Lord as that which even persons at a distance from the perfect religion, which He came to introduce, might take hold of, and thus render themselves capable of higher teaching, more peculiar to that perfect religion. If this is the case, then we may consider this selection of His as furnishing us with hints as to our dealing with those who are outside the Church, whether they belong to some imperfect form of Christianity or not. Before even the necessary instruction as to matters of faith or of internal purity and the like, this exhortation to charity, to the forgiveness of injuries,

¹ Daniel iv. 24.

the love of enemies, and the like, may be set before them, and their practice of these precepts will secure for them wonderful blessings, which may lead them to the full faith and bring about their submission to the Church. For the precept of charity is laid upon man as man, although it has been made a new precept by the example and injunction of our Lord, grounded on His own practice and on the new tie by which men are bound one to another through Him. And it is the accustomed order of God's Providence to lead on those who are faithful to more general and natural precepts into the fuller light and grace of the Gospel Kingdom.

To say this is to say that the foundation, on which all these precepts of charity rest, is a truth which is not far removed from the reach of any thoughtful man who believes in God, and who is ready to worship Him and obey Him according to the dictates of the natural law. And indeed, when we examine what is the foundation of the charity which our Lord here recommends in so many various phases and developments, we find it to be nothing else than the truth that we are bound to love our neighbours for the sake of God. This implies that God is the common Father of all, that He has created us and placed us in society, with duties not only to Himself but also to one another for His sake, and that our duties to Him cannot be discharged except we love others for His sake. Here is certainly a bond of union and an obligation of affection which rise far higher than the common motives of self-interest, which make us love those who are useful to us, often in ways contrary to our own true interests and to the laws of God, far higher, again, than the motive of love which consists in a common origin or family or nationality, or anything else of that kind. And where this Divine principle of charity exists, it is powerful enough, in all reason, to support the weight of the great

obligations which it involves. The love which is founded on the love and duty which we owe to God, is the truest love, because it cannot wish to those whom we love any but the true goods, such as are consistent with the motive of devotion and love to God. Such a love is unchangeable and firm, because it does not depend on the conduct or the characters or the demeanour of men, who may vary in their behaviour to us, and become in themselves, at one time more deserving of love, at another time less so. Such a love is wide in the objects which it embraces, because it enfolds all who are one with us in any way in God, and through God, all mankind, and even the holy angels. Such a love is strong, for it rests on a motive which is capable of urging men to the greatest of sacrifices and to the overcoming of the most formidable obstacles. It is sincere, because the ground on which it rests is the truth itself, and it is perfect, because it makes us most like to God, Who is love. And yet, if it be true, as it appears to be, that our Lord appeals to this love as possible, even in those who are far from the full light of His kingdom, it must follow that He considered it not impossible for such persons to have so much knowledge of God and of His character as is required for the formation of this active principle of charity in their hearts.

If we may consider that our Lord has here selected these precepts of charity, because He sees that they are not beyond the reach of men who are not far advanced in interior virtue, though they have a true faith as to God, and as to His providential arrangement of human society, we may pause for a moment to remark on the goodness, mercifulness, and tenderness in the method of God's government of the world which are thus disclosed to us. For it is a proof of God's infinite goodness that He should have founded even the natural society of men, in which they were to find so much of thei

happiness or misery in this life, on a principle which ought to be powerful enough to secure such conduct in all or each, as might make human life intensely happy, in the highest degree of which it is capable here. This consideration of God's goodness is enhanced by that other to which it naturally leads, that in the law by which God has enacted that we are to obtain absolute forgiveness for our offences against Him, on condition of pardoning one another, He has put in our hands a means of reconciling ourselves to Him and of bringing down on ourselves untold blessings, which is at the same time not too hard for the strength of our poor nature. It is not as if there were no way of reconciliation with Him which did not imply great mortifications and painful penances. Charity is more happy as a state of mind and heart than hostility and hatred, it brings with it peace and joy to our own hearts, it enlarges the range of our sympathies and turns enemies into friends. No doubt it costs much to human nature, in its depraved and degraded state, for it is a victory over self-love. But it is a victory which brings with it a present reward as well as a future crown.

It seems also that there is something analogous in this beautiful arrangement of God to that other device of His love, if we may so speak, by which He has made faith so meritorious. Faith, like charity, was a precept on man as man. It did not come into the world with the covenant made with Abraham, nor with the Law given on Sinai, nor with the Gospel revelation. It was from the beginning, as our Lord said of the institution of marriage. It is as old as prayer, as worship, or as sacrifice. Faith is an intellectual act commanded by the will ; and it ought to cost us very little to believe the Word of God. It is a reasonable, indeed the only reasonable, use of the intellect in regard of such truths

as those which are proposed to us on authority. And yet it is made the condition of grace and forgiveness, fuller of merit than a thousand acts of religious observance of which it is not the ground. To a thoughtful mind there are a thousand inducements to faith, and very few difficulties. The difficulties come, in the main, from our own narrowness of perception of the greatness and goodness of God. It is happier to believe than not to believe. And so it is with charity. To persons who are prepared for grace by their own consciousness of sin, by the feeling of their need of forgiveness, of the injuries to the majesty of God of which they are guilty, and of the terrible expiation which they owe to His justice, nothing can seem more full of condescension and compassionateness than the intimation that their own great debts may be cancelled in a moment, by their treatment of others in the same way as that in which they would desire to be themselves treated by God. The instinct of clemency, the feeling of a common nature binding men together under the rule of a common Father of all, the nobility of mercifulness, its usefulness, the unbecomingness of exacting the last farthing, even when we can exact it, the folly of perpetuating evil feelings and rivalries, and animosities which may last on, and meet us again in the form of vengeance, when the wheel of fortune has gone round, and we find ourselves in turn in need of mercy and forgiveness—all these things are natural helps to the temper of mercy and charity. These considerations make it less surprising that our Lord should have chosen in this place to set forth these lofty precepts, even when the audience to whom they were proposed was not in so high a stage of spirituality as that to which He had addressed them in the former great Sermon.

It is not necessary that anything more should be

said in general with regard to the position of this commandment of charity in this discourse of our Lord. We may now proceed to the particular injunctions which our Lord lays down, meeting, as it seems, the struggling instinct of self-love on all points on which it asserts itself, and pursuing it into all the strongholds in which it endeavours to entrench itself. Our Lord's words are as follows: 'But I say to you that hear, love your enemies, do good to them that hate you, bless them that curse you, and pray for them that calumniate you. And to him that striketh thee on the one cheek offer also the other, and him that taketh away from thee thy cloak forbid not to take thy coat also. Give to every one that asketh of thee, and of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again. And as you would that men should do to you do you also to them in like manner.'

Thus in a few words does our Blessed Lord sum up most concisely but most fully the great precept of the love which we owe to our neighbour. His injunctions follow one another, each one adding a new line to the commandment, each one removing some of the hindrances to its perfect observance, or declaring some new point of its positive requirements. In the first place, our neighbour is to be loved. That this may be rightly understood, the first step must be to answer that question which was afterwards put to our Lord by the Scribe, 'Who is my neighbour?' and the false gloss must be removed, of which He makes distinct mention in the Sermon on the Mount, namely, that enemies are not neighbours, and that as we are to love our neighbours, so also are we to hate our enemies. But according to the law of God and of nature, the ground on which the obligation of loving others rests is equal in the case both of friends and enemies in the common sense of the

names. For that ground is our common relation to God as the Father of all alike. Our enemies, therefore, in the ordinary sense of the term, are to be loved, not for their enmity, but because we have more in common with them than not, and a greater tie to bind us to them than reason for aversion from them. Then the question arises, in the poor narrowness of our minds, what are the circumstances which are to suffice for the cancelling of the bond between us and those whom we call our enemies? If they hate us, if they revile us, if they speak against us, either in detraction, or in abuse and contumelious language, if they calumniate us, if they strike us, if they injure us, if they take away our property, if they hurt us in honour, in reputation, even in what concerns our life itself—are these to be grounds sufficient for the withdrawal in their case of that love which we owe to them for the sake of God? The answer is that in all these cases the law of charity is to override the motives which seem to oppose its observance. We are not only to love them, but we are to do more—we are to benefit them to the extent of our power, we are to speak well of them, to pray for them, we are to desire and procure their spiritual good, and, for the sake of that we are to suffer injury, we are to submit to the loss of temporal goods, we are to give them what they ask of us, and in a word we are to do to them all things which we should wish them to do to us. This is the declaration which our Lord makes concerning the application of this Divine precept of charity. Let us now consider the separate clauses of the passage.

The first part of this passage lays down four precepts. We are to love our enemies, we are to do good to those who hate us, we are to bless them that curse us, and we are to pray for them that calumniate us. The evils with which we are thus to deal increase, as they follow

one on the other, in the degree of malice which they imply. Enmity is a bad thing, hatred is a worse thing, cursing and calumny are still worse. We are to meet them by corresponding degrees of goodness on our own part—love, beneficence, blessing, and prayer. The precept of love is universal, and nothing exempts us from it. This is the one great principle on which God's institution of society is built, and our forgetfulness of which makes us think all these precepts of our Lord so many romantic exaggerations, instead of truths founded on strictest reason and duty. It is necessary that our love should be positive, and not stop short at the absence of evil wishing. The desire for the good of our enemies and of those who hate us is sufficient if we bear them a general goodwill, but there may be particular circumstances and occasions under which this general goodwill must become particular and specific. It is the same with the external signs and marks of friendship; we are not to refuse to any the common signs of love which are expected, in ordinary intercourse, between members of the same society and community; but we are not obliged by any precept to give to all indiscriminately the special marks of affection which pass between near friends and relatives. And, with regard to the goodwill which we are bound to have to all, it is not contrary to this to wish to some people temporal evils, that they may be brought to repentance thereby, or that some evil designs of theirs may be thereby defeated, nor is it necessary to have the same measure of goodwill to all, as if all were equal in this respect; for the order of charity must be observed. So also with active beneficence; it is not contrary to this to inflict temporal evil, for the sake of doing good to those to whom we do it, as when a child is punished by a parent, or a malefactor by a judge. The word that is rendered ‘bless,’ in regard of those who

curse us, and the corresponding word ‘curse,’ are to be taken as signifying all kinds of good speaking and all kinds of evil speaking. Thus men may say all manner of evil against us, as well as curse us formally, and we are in return to speak well of them, to praise them, to honour them in our words, as well as to bless them in the formal sense of the term. There is also a special significance in the precept by which we are enjoined to pray for those who calumniate us. For this is the greatest evil of the kind that can be done to us, and prayer is needed in this case even more than in the others, because it is sometimes only by prayer that the innocence of the calumniated can be made manifest, as was the case with the chaste Susanna, and again, it is often the case that God grants to the prayers of the injured the conversion of their calumniators. It is also very often found that the only means by which we can keep down our own indignation and anger, under such circumstances, is by having recourse to the practice which is here enjoined, which then becomes a duty to ourselves. And indeed, in all these precepts, the effect on our own souls is a part of the object of the legislation. In the case of calumnies uttered against us, the precept of which we are speaking is all the more needed to secure our own peace and charity, because it is not forbidden us, it may even sometimes become our duty to defend ourselves against the false charge—though we are not allowed to seek for vindication for the sake of the punishment of the guilty accusers. This may suffice for the commentary on the first part of this passage.

The next two precepts in this great passage relate to the virtue of patience, which is so necessary for all those who would practise the charity which has already been enjoined. For this virtue makes large demands upon our human infirmities, and it is only by patience

that its observance can be secured. ‘And to him that striketh thee on the one cheek, offer also the other, and him that taketh from thee thy cloak, forbid not to take thy coat also.’ Nothing but the most consummate patience can enable us to act up to this principle, and where there is patience in this perfection in the interior man, there will be no difficulty in the external action which is here enjoined, while, on the other hand, any one who has this perfect interior patience will be able to decide for himself, according to the rules of holy prudence, whether the outward act is to accompany and manifest the inward disposition or not. For it will not be always the best thing to turn the other cheek actually, as we see by the example of our Lord, of which we shall speak presently. For to do so, might in some cases even add to the sin of the person striking us, instead of bringing about his conversion, or in any way glorifying God. The same remark holds good as to the next precept, that of suffering injuries patiently, when they extend beyond our own person to our external goods. Here we are enjoined, in the first instance, the internal virtue of patience and indifference to the loss of external goods of any kind, when the putting up with that loss, however unjust, is expedient in view of the good of our neighbour, or the preservation of our own peace and charity. For the process of recovering what has been taken away from us unjustly, is often connected, almost of necessity, with the loss of charity, and with disturbance to ourselves which is injurious to perfection. But we are preserved against all dangers of this kind by the principle here urged by our Lord. And, on the other hand, we are not forbidden to recover, either by law or by our own exertions, what we have been deprived of, in cases when there is no danger at all to higher goods.

The next words of the passage seem to pass beyond the precept of patience, and to add a new virtue, that of mercy, to those of charity and patience which have been already enjoined. ‘Give to every one that asketh thee, and of him that taketh away thy goods, ask them not again.’ Here again it is the principle and the disposition of mind that our Lord insists upon. For there must be many cases in which to act literally in this way would be impossible, or at least imprudent, like that of the other case of offering the other cheek to the smiter. We are not always able to find what to give to every one who asks, and, as we shall see presently, if would often be against the true meaning of the precept so to do. But no one is to be shut out from the range of our beneficence, when there is reason for its exercise, and in this sense we are to give to every one, because we are to refuse no one, in whom the simple title of need exists to move our mercifulness, as would be the case, for instance, if we were to decline to aid some one who had offended us or injured us, or in whom we saw any other qualities which we dislike.

Our Lord continues: ‘And of him that taketh away thy goods, ask them not again.’ This is another shape of the same virtue of beneficence, in cases in which we have suffered wrong and injury, not to seek to reclaim what has been taken from us, most of all in cases in which the reclamation of our property would be likely to injure charity, or when the person who has done the material wrong has a real need of what has been taken from us. We find something very like this among the precepts of charity and brotherly kindness in the Book of Deuteronomy, where the Israelites are told, “when thou shalt demand of thy neighbour anything that he oweth thee, thou shalt not go into his house to take

away a pledge, but thou shall stand without, and he shall bring out to thee what he hath; but if he be poor, the pledge shall not lodge with thee that night, but thou shalt restore it to him before the going down of the sun, that he may sleep in his own raiment, and bless thee, and thou mayest have justice before the Lord thy God.'² It is clear that this, like the other portions of this passage, contains what is in some cases a precept, in other cases a counsel, according to the circumstances of the persons with whom we have to do, and our own relations to them. There is throughout a silent reference to the various excuses of self-love and narrowness of heart as to the practice of charity, on each one of which excuses our Lord seems, as it were, to set His foot. It is remarkable that St. Basil says in one of his works, that this passage is one in which our Lord has put forth certain great maxims of perfection in a tentative way, as if to prove how far the patience and charity of His servants could go, rather than as laying down strict precepts in all these matters. The doctrine of St. Basil cannot perhaps be entirely followed in our interpretation of the passage, but its existence in the works of so great a master of spirituality is a proof that he felt the difficulty of the literal acceptance of all these injunctions as matters of precept. But it becomes more easily intelligible if we suppose that our Lord is contradicting, one after another, the subterfuges of self-love in the matter of the exercise of charity. The chief difficulty, which will always make such passages as this sound hard even to most Christians, lies in the deeply rooted misconceptions which prevail as to the extent to which mutual charity is enjoined by the natural law given to us by God when He founded human society as such. These misconceptions are the progeny of human selfish-

² Deut. xxiv. 10—13.

ness, and they have been multiplying in the world since Cain killed Abel. It is as if our Lord had said : ‘Do I tell you to love your friends and hate your enemies? No,—I tell you to love your enemies. Do I tell you to treat evilly those who hate you? No,—I tell you to do good to them. Do I tell you to give back cursing to those who curse you, to speak evil of those who speak evil of you, to spread false charges against those who calumniate you? No,—I bid you bless those who curse you, and pray for those who calumniate you. Are you to give back blow for blow? No,—you are to offer the other cheek to him that smites you, and if a man has taken away your cloak, that is so far from being a reason why you should shut up your heart against him, that I bid you let him take your coat also if he needs it. You ask Me to whom you are to give and to whom you are not to give? Well, I say you are to give to every one who asks of you, the simple fact that he asks is in itself a presumption that he is in need, and even if such a person has already taken away your goods, do not demand them back. And I sum up the whole doctrine on which you are to act in a few words of the most general import: “As you would that men should do to you, do you also to them in like manner.”’

There is a directness and a fervour and a thoroughness, so to speak, about this short declaration of the doctrine of charity, which seem to remind us of the joyous self-abandonment of saints like St. Francis, in their utter contradiction of all worldly maxims and customs, as when the Saint just named declared that nothing could be perfect joy except illtreatment of every kind for the sake of God. But our Blessed Lord does not lay down all these precepts without also founding them on the most substantial reasons, addressed, indeed,

to faith. Thus it is well to proceed to once to give the rest of the context, and then to draw out the reasoning which it embodies or supposes. It will then be seen that the principle which is here laid down is thoroughly sound and intelligible, though it may seem to overpass the natural limits of kindness and charity, and to insist on acting from motives which transcend the ordinary morality of mankind. It supposes a ground of love, as has been shown above, which exists in cases in which men do not commonly love one another. It ignores and makes light of grounds of enmity which are usually considered sufficient to justify the most hostile treatment of those in whom they are to be found. And our Lord appears to meet this difficulty at once, as if it had been objected to Him. His words seem to meet the objection, 'Why are we to love, and show love, in these measures and manners? What ground is there for the charity which is thus to be shown?' They imply that the true charity, that which is worthy of the name of charity, and to which the reward of charity is due, is that which is not based upon any consideration of self-interest, that which is not a price paid, as it were, for similar treatment at the hand of others. 'And if you love them that love you, what thanks are to you? for sinners also love those that love them. And if you do good to them who do good to you, what thanks are to you? for sinners also do this. And if you lend to them of whom you hope to receive, what thanks are to you? for sinners also lend to sinners, for to receive as much.' Thus does our Lord deny the false principle, on which the charity, so called, of self-interest is founded. And He goes on immediately to put in its place the true charity, which alone is like the beneficence of God, Who cannot possibly gain anything by the bounties and mercies which He bestows. 'But

love ye your enemies, do good and lend, hoping for nothing thereby, and your reward shall be great, and you shall be the sons of the Highest, for He is kind to the unthankful, and to the evil. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.'

Thus the principle on which our Lord grounds His precept of charity is that we are not to do good or practise kindness out of hope of any good thing in this world which may result to us therefrom. That is as it were to make a merchandise of the most noble and beautiful virtue of which our nature is capable. It is like buying and selling, in which case there is no credit to be gained, and for which no one is thought worthy of any special honour as a benefactor or hero. What we love in those who love us, is the good which their love is to us, what we look to in the kindness we do to those who do kindness to us is the benefit to ourselves, what we seek in the lending to others who will repay us is the service which that repayment may be. We lose nothing and we risk nothing. This may be a sufficient motive for external friendliness, and for the mutual assistance by means of which merely godless societies are carried on, but it is nothing that can have any currency in the heavenly country to which all our thoughts and aims are to be directed. For that it is essential that we should deserve something on account of what we have done, something which may be called our own, because we have earned it at the cost of our own interest or even our own suffering. But in order that this duty should be recognized as such, it is necessary that the truth on which it rests should be recognized also. That truth can be nothing else but the fact that we are as truly God's social creatures as we are His creatures at all, that He has placed us in society, with all the relations and bonds which it implies, with duties to one another and to the community at large as

truly of obligation as are duties to Himself. And this truth is supplemented by another, that in our present state we are on probation and on trial, and that our whole future is to depend on the issue of that probation. We have crowns to win or miseries to incur, and the crowns are to be purchased by our behaviour here and to one another. Thus to obtain the future gifts which God has in store, we must ourselves give here below.

Our life then must be a life of beneficence and mercy. It must be truly giving, and giving which is truly such must bring nothing to the giver. Such is the love we give to those who do not love us. Such are the benefits we give to those from whom we expect no return. This is truly the charity or beneficence of God, and should therefore be that which His children practise. Such in truth is the beneficence of the holy angels, the sons of the Highest, in their dealings with the other creatures of God who are committed by Him to their charge. Such, above all other examples, is the beneficence of the Incarnate Son of God Himself, the teacher of true charity by example before He became its teacher by precept. ‘And your reward shall be great, and you shall be the sons of the Highest, for He is kind to the unthankful and to the evil.’ Here then are two motives suggested by our Lord for this kind of charity which He urges, as has been already said, not only on the more perfect disciples in His Divine school, but on those also who are almost beginners in it. These two motives are that their reward shall be great, and that they shall be the sons of the Highest. Of the first motive our Lord says nothing at this point, though He returns to it afterwards. Those who act thus, in the second place, shall be the sons of the Highest, because their manner of acting will be a repetition of His, and thus they will fulfil the natural law by which children are bound to be

like their fathers, and by which the whole of His Kingdom is governed on the principle that it is a great family, the members of which are bound together by their relation to Him first, and through Him to one another.

It is very noticeable that this principle of the imitation of God, the great Father of all, which seems at first sight so sublime, as indeed it is, but also so far raised above the common level of human actions and motives, which it ought not to be, is alone sufficient, not only for the conduct which our Lord enjoins, but also for the perfect explanation of the difficulties which may be raised against the indiscriminate application of His precept. In the first place, the command to love our enemies and the rest, may be said to be nothing more than a rule to act as God acts. For certainly God loves His enemies, and shows His love for them in the most practical measures of beneficence. Sin is the enemy of God, the only thing that God hates, and the sinner hates God and, so far as he is a sinner, is the enemy of God. But God, though He hates sin, loves the sinner, who uses against Him the nature which He has given him, and which is entirely dependent for its life and exercise on His continual concurrence and assistance, for if these were for a moment withdrawn, the existence of the sinner would cease. No thought or word or act, no use of any natural faculty or power, no use of the creatures external to the sinner and necessary for his existence or for the perpetration of the sin by which he rebels against his Maker and God, can be begun or completed without the assistance of God. And, all the time that the sinner is running his course of rebellion, his most loving God is waiting for him, contriving means for his repentance and restoration, and loading him with a continual shower of temporal benefits, often giving him the good things of

this world, to which he has no right, because He foresees that He cannot hereafter give him the good things of the next life. And the greatest of all God's acts outside Himself, is the redemption of a world of sinners, purely out of love for them. Thus does God not only love, but benefits His enemies.

Again, God is perpetually blessing those who curse Him, and if He does not pray for those who calumniate Him, it is only because He is the Being Who hears prayer and does not make it. And indeed our Lord in His Sacred Humanity is the great example of prayer for His enemies. God gives to those who calumniate Him, especially those who speak against His truth and revile Him in His providence and government of the world—as is the case with heretics, and with infidels who deny Him because they cannot understand His goodness—the benefit of many prayers, and boons which sometimes no prayer could win. And in His Sacred Humanity our Lord is always pleading for mercy before the throne of His Father. It may be said that God allows Himself to be smitten on one cheek and turns the other to the smiter, for this is what those do, who, when they have received an injury or an insult, do not avenge themselves except by exposing themselves afresh to the same unworthy treatment at the hands of the same persons. Now this is what God does with every sinner who has insulted Him, and to whom He nevertheless continues the means or the faculties by which the insult has been inflicted on Him. A man uses wealth, or power, or strength, or influence, or eloquence, or learning, against God or His Church, and God does not take away from him the good things which have thus been abused to an evil purpose, notwithstanding the mischief which may again be done by their abuse, but He continues His enemies in their possession,

or even, as is sometimes the case, He augments these very means of evil, which have inflicted so much dis-honour on Him. The same may be said of the other instance of which our Lord speaks, in which a man who has taken away our cloak is not to be hindered from taking our coat also. For everything that men possess or use in their wickedness belongs to God and is His property, committed to men only that it may be used for His service, and His service is robbed when another use is made of it. Yet God permits men to go on using one power or faculty after another, one period of life after another, instead of cutting short the dishonour done to Himself at the first transgression. He gives to every one that asks of Him, not only in the case of prayer, which is always answered by Him—though not always, as we shall see, by the very gift actually asked—but also in the free use and liberty, as to the life and faculties which He has given them, which He allows even to the worst of men, the men who are doing Him the most dishonour and injury by the manner in which they avail themselves of the indulgence which He does not deny them. They do as they will, they are allowed to squander themselves and the good gifts of God, their own natural gifts and their opportunities of using them, and the external gifts of fortune and the like, which fall in their way, and it seems as if God never called them to an account in this world, though there is a terrible day of reckoning for them at the end of time.

In this way it may be said that God, in His dealings with men, is an example of that kind of unresisting charity of which our Lord here speaks. And on the other hand, it is equally true that the example of God may help us to understand that what is here recommended is no foolish unreasoning and unreasonable softness, putting itself entirely into the power of any one

who may choose to injure us, or to abuse our goodness, inasmuch as God Himself does not act in such a manner, but sets certain bounds and conditions, which He observes in the very administration of His own infinite bounties. Thus, it has already been said, that our Lord Himself, when before the tribunal of Annas, and when He had been struck on the cheek by one of the servants there present, did not turn the other cheek, though His ineffable charity was, certainly, ready not only to be buffeted, but to die for the offender. But He remonstrated gently but firmly against the violation of justice which had been committed by the servant and not rebuked by the Chief Priest. Again, St. Paul availed himself of the rights of Roman citizenship which he possessed, instead of meekly submitting to be handed over by the Governor to the plots of the Jews against his life. Again, our Lord did not always give to every one that asked of Him what He was asked to give, as in the case of the petition which was made for her sons by the mother of Zebedee's children, nor did He allow the man out of whom the legion of devils had been cast, to join the holy company of the apostles who lived with Him. Nor is it forbidden to Christians to resist the injustice of men who take away their goods, or to recover their rights or their property by the processes of law, nor are Christian nations forbidden to go to war for a just cause, and to defend their rights by force. Here we have a number of instances in which this law of universal, and, as it may be said, unreasoning, charity does not apply at all, or has to be modified.

How then are we to know when it is of obligation, and when it is better and more perfect not to observe it literally? Can we find in the manner of God's own action the rule which is to guide us in this as in the other instance? In the first place, it may be said that although

God always loves His enemies, He very constantly shows His love for them by punishments, warnings, chastisements, afflictions, which He sends them in His providence, for the purpose of awakening them to repentance, and so making them worthy of the true blessings which He has to bestow. This would seem to point to the truth that it may often be that the greatest act of charity is to be severe instead of indulgent in our conduct to others, to reprove them, to rebuke them, to deny them the marks of friendship and esteem which they seek from us, to refuse their requests when they would if granted do them harm, and, when we have the power and the commission, to punish them. This kind of conduct is not against charity—it is the only true charity in such cases. Again, the reason why our Lord, when before the judge Annas, did not submit without remonstrance to the insult which was inflicted upon Him, was probably founded on the fact that the insult of the blow given Him was not simply a wrong to Himself in His own individual Person, but an outrage against the holy place of justice and the Divine authority with which courts of justice are invested. It was therefore our Lord's business to protest against the violation of decency in such a place, against an insult to the Divine Majesty which is represented in all such tribunals, which have their real authority from God and not from man. Here then we come on another law which may and must frequently qualify our observance of the simple precept of submitting to injuries which affect our own persons or rights. In the former case it was the private good of the person with whom we are dealing that may make it a duty to us, not to suspend in any way our practice of charity towards him, but to practise our charity in the way of severity rather than of indulgence and submission to wrong. In this second case it is the public good, the interest of right and law and

legitimate authority, the ordinance of God, our duties to the Church or to the State, which may require of us the exercise of charity in the way of resistance, remonstrance, or even of a kind of retaliation, which may vindicate the right and punish the offender. This is the second case in which it is right to observe this precept in a way different from that of simple compliance, and in each of these cases the practical application of the principle may be very frequent and very far-reaching.

There may be other limitations, if limitations they can be called, to the unthinking practice of submissiveness of this kind. Our Lord mentions, certainly without reprobation, the case of the prudent virgins in the parable, who would not give away the oil which they had provided, in order to help the case of the foolish virgins who had made no such provision. ‘Lest perhaps there be not enough for you and for us.’ There is an order in the practice of the Divine virtue of charity, and according to that order the regard we are to have for our own souls and their spiritual interests must come before our desire to be of service to others. Thus we can never truly practise charity to others at the cost of our own souls. It must often happen to a parent, a superior, a person in an office of public trust, to find it his duty to be severe and unkind, as it may seem, in the exaction of what is due, in insisting on what is right, and in this case he must act on the principle of the order of charity of which we are speaking. There is an anecdote of St. Catharine of Siena which illustrates this, when she debated within herself whether she could give to a beggar some clothes she was wearing and which were necessary for decency, and decided that she could not part with them, even for the sake of clothing the naked. Again, our Lord, as has been said,

did not grant the petition made by the mother of His two favoured Apostles, that they might sit on His right hand and on His left hand, in His Kingdom. He said they did not know what they asked, and He added that these seats of pre-eminence were not His to give, but should be given to those for whom they had been prepared by His Father.³ In this case the principle which comes in to qualify unrestricted giving and pliancy to the requests of those who ask of us, is that of the due regard to the rights of others.

In all these cases, and in any other of the same kind which may occur, it is not that we do not fulfil the law of charity by refusing what is asked of us, or by defending our just rights, and the like. We really fulfil it more perfectly than we should, if we were to act otherwise. We are to imitate God in our charity, and we have also the other rule given to us in this passage, that as we would that men should do to us, we also should do to them in like manner. But neither of these rules would be followed, if we were to observe the precept of giving, or of non-resistance to injury, in the cases which have been mentioned. God never is deaf to any prayer that is made to Him. But He rules all with intense love and wisdom, and it would not be according to His love or His wisdom if He put Himself into the hands of His blind and foolish creatures, in granting them their petitions just as they are made by them. He hears the prayer, and gives them some good thing in answer to it, but not the false good which in their ignorance they may ask for. He regards the order of His Kingdom, and this sometimes requires that He should not spare even in this world those with whom He is in general so forbearing. There are certain offences which strike at the root of the order of things

² St. Matt. xx. 22.

which He has established, and in such cases He is as it were bound to vindicate that order for the sake of the world at large or of the Church, as is the case with persecutors, and with certain other sinners whose offences cry to Him for vengeance. He cannot grant what is injurious to His own honour or law, or what is contrary to the true interests, in time and in eternity, of those who ask amiss. Nor can we, in any reason, be desirous that men should treat us with so much real unkindness, as to grant all that we ask them when we ask foolishly, and what is against our own true interests, against the rights of others, against the law of God, against the common good, or against the Church. With these due qualifications and explanations, the universal law which our Lord has here laid down is not beyond the power of those to whom He gives it. The rules which moral theologians have drawn out for our guidance, in which they distinguish between what is of justice and what is of charity, between what may be claimed in cases of extreme necessity, and in others where the necessity is not so urgent, are full of wisdom, and do not deserve the taunts which the enemies of the Church have hurled against them, as if they were explanations of the Law reducing it to nothing, like the traditions of the Pharisees of which our Lord complains as making the Law of God of no avail.

It is also to be noted in general, with regard to the passage now before us, that the thought of the love of God, as the motive of all that is here enjoined, runs through the whole series of precepts, as well as that of the reward which we are to look for at His hands. When we are told that the love which sinners bear to one another, and which prompts them to do one another good in the hope of return in like kind, is not enough for us, we are at once led to seek for some higher

motive for our love and for the good which we do, than the love of our own interest which even sinners can understand and act upon. But there can be no other love higher than this, except the love of God, for Whose sake we are to render to others the love and the service of which our Lord here speaks. Again, when our Lord says, as He does say, as an argument which we are to recognize as cogent in the matter for which He adduces it, ‘What thanks are to you:’ what do you do worthy of thanks, if you act in these concerns only from self-love? He implies that there is some One from Whom thanks or retribution are to be expected, and that the expectation of such retribution is to be the motive, or at least a motive, for the conduct which He recommends. Now it is certain that this retribution or gratitude cannot come from those to whom we show kindness, however much they may be bound and inclined to give us the best that they can give in this respect. For this hypothesis of repayment from them is the very thing which He rejects as insufficient for His disciples. The thanks, therefore, and reward are to be repaid us by God.

And it is worthy of remark that, in this and other passages, our Lord should speak as if God owed us something, as is, in a certain true sense the case, because it is the beneficence of His children that carries out His arrangements for the government of the world, which, on the other hand, are thwarted and opposed by the selfishness of the generality of men, who so administer the good things which are placed in their hands, as to give the needy and weak and afflicted classes in society reason to think that they have much to complain of in the Providence under which they live. On the other hand, when charity reigns in society and in the relations between man and man, class and class, then the good

government of God is justified, and He has the service done to Him which consists in that justification, as well as that which consists in the relief and help of those who belong to Him, according to the saying of our Lord that whatever is done to the least of His brethren is done unto Himself. Our Lord speaks in the same way later on, when He tells the person who had invited Him, ‘When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends nor thy brethren nor thy kinsfolk nor thy neighbours who are rich, lest perhaps they also invite thee again, and a recompense be made to thee. But when thou makest a feast, call the poor and the maimed, the lame, and the blind, and thou shalt be blessed, because they have not wherewith to make thee recompense.’ And He adds, ‘For recompense shall be made thee in the resurrection of the just.’⁴

‘But love ye your enemies, do good and lend, hoping for nothing thereby, and your reward shall be great, and you shall be the sons of the Highest, for He is kind to the unthankful and to the evil. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.’ It seems as if our Lord was led instinctively, if we may so speak, to dwell on the imitation of His Father as the great motive for charity and mercifulness, and that for this He passes over the statement of the reward which He promises, great as it shall be. He has made it a special benediction for one of the former Beatitudes, that of the peacemakers, that they shall be called the children of God. For there can be no higher honour than to be like God in anything, and such an imitation of Him on the part of those who are in their stage of probation cannot be without a great reward, apart even from its own blessedness. For He Who is so kind to the unthankful and to the evil, must be far more magnificent in His dealings with the thankful

⁴ St. Luke xiv. 12—14.

and faithful and good. But our Lord speaks as if the simple resemblance to God was to be the highest of rewards and blessings. ‘Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.’ The range of human mercies is comparatively small, when compared to that of the mercifulness of God, but as far as it extends we are to imitate our Father in this gracious virtue.

St. Thomas tells us that in itself mercy may be the greatest of virtues, because it pours out good on others, and relieves their necessities and deficiencies, and thus it is the virtue of one who is above others, and when, as in the case of God, He has no superior, it is in this sense the highest of virtues.⁵ In us charity which unites us to God may be higher, but our Lord is here speaking of charity and mercy almost in one, for it is the mercy that we can practise because we are the children of God. It is also remarked by one of the great Christian writers, that as our Lord speaks of humility as the virtue in which we are most specially to imitate Himself, so also He speaks of mercy as that in which we are most especially to imitate His Father. And it is remarkable how much the mercifulness of God is spoken of in the Old Testament, where we should expect to find more about His justice or omnipotence. Thus in the vision of Moses on the Mount, it is said that he cried out, ‘O the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, patient and of much compassion and true, Who keepest mercy unto thousands, Who takest away iniquity and wickedness, and sin, and no man of himself is innocent before Thee.’⁶ And so in the Psalms: ‘Thou, O Lord, art sweet and mild, and plenteous in mercy to all that call on Thee.’⁷ And again, ‘The Lord is compassionate and merciful, longsuffering, and plenteous in mercy. He

⁵ 2a. 2æ. xxx. 4.

⁶ Exodus xxxiv. 6, 7.

⁷ Psalm lxxxv. 5.

will not always be angry, nor will He threaten for ever.'⁸ Joel cries out, 'He is gracious and merciful, patient and rich in mercy, and ready to repent of the evil.'⁹ And Jonas gives it as an excuse for his reluctance to undertake the mission to Ninive, 'I beseech Thee, O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my own country? Wherefore I went before to flee into Tharsis, for I know that Thou art a gracious and merciful God, patient and of much compassion, and easy to forgive evil.'¹⁰ In the New Testament God is, as St. Paul calls Him, the 'Father of mercies.' Our Blessed Lady in her Canticle seems to pass from the contemplation of the power and holiness of God to that of His mercies, then again to the display of power in the rejection of the Angels and the exaltation of mankind, and then again she speaks of Him as remembering His mercies in taking hold of Israel His servant. The Canticle of Zachary is full of the mercifulness of God. We may pause here, then, for a few moments to see if we can discover any special features of the mercifulness of God which may be in a measure imitated by us.

In the first place, it is quite certain that God is always predisposed, so to speak, to mercy rather than to justice in the exaction of punishment. His first act towards His creatures, the act of Creation, is one of pure mercy, and it implies a perpetual exertion of mercy to preserve us. The whole history of His dealings with men is a history of mercy, the promise of the Incarnation and Redemption being made at once on the Fall, and the mercifulness which dictated that promise being made the dominant rule of all the subsequent economy. When the sins of men obliged God to chastise the world by the Deluge, He still remembered His mercy, and preserved the holy seed out of which was to come forth the

. ⁸ Psalm cii. 8, 9.

⁹ Joel ii. 13.

¹⁰ Jonas iv. 2.

blessing for the whole race, in which even the generation which was so chastised was to participate. On both these occasions, it would not have been unjust in God to destroy the world altogether, and that He did not do this is a proof that He is more prone to mercy than to judgment. Another instance of His mercifulness is found in the very history which relates the destruction of the cities of the Plain, for we are there told that, even in that supreme hour of most just punishment for abominable sins, God listened to the intercession of Abraham, and would have spared the whole population which was doomed to death, if only ten righteous souls could have been found there. But it would be useless to attempt to enumerate all the instances of this predisposition on the part of God. It is clearly the witness of Scripture that He is always more disposed to mercy than to severity, and, as the Church says in one of her collects, He shows His almighty power rather in sparing and in having mercy than in any other way.

We may pass on to another consideration, namely that of the manner in which God shows Himself inclined to mercy in the matter of rewarding His friends and servants. It is the doctrine of Scripture and of the Church, that God rewards intentions, designs, desires, of doing Him service, as if they had been actually accomplished, even although they had never gone beyond the stage of conception, so to speak. This is a part of His mercy as well of His magnificence, for the reason why so many good intentions and designs for the glory of God do not reach their accomplishment is to be found in the weakness and instability of human powers, in the infirmities of our present condition, in the shortness of life, and the like. It is a real act of compassion to take the will for the deed, and thus to remedy the feebleness of our poor nature out of the boundless resources of the

goodness of God. ‘The Lord hath heard the desire of the poor,’ says the Psalmist,¹¹ and under the word poor we must consider that all men are included, on account of the extreme poverty of their nature, in comparison with the desires which they are able to conceive, and which are thus counted by God as if they had been put into execution. One great instance of this is the case of Abraham, who received so large a blessing because he was ready to sacrifice his son at the bidding of God. Another is David, who conceived the plan of building the Temple, a plan which he was not allowed to execute, but for which nevertheless he received a magnificent blessing. Some writers have seen a reference to this doctrine in the fact that our Lord was not able, on account of His great exhaustion, to carry His Cross the whole way to the summit of Calvary, but was assisted by Simon of Cyrene, as if it had been meant that we should learn, even from Him, that there are many enterprises for the glory or service of God which we can only begin, but it is not for that the less of a service to Him to begin them, or even only to desire them. Good and great and large desires of His service are immense blessings, and such as are capable of winning for us an immense reward, as we are taught to pray by the Church, that He ‘will raise our minds to heavenly desires.’ And St. Francis de Sales teaches us that God often puts such desires into our hearts that we may have the merit of them, although in His infinite wisdom He does not mean us to carry them out. This then is another consideration by which we may learn to measure the mercifulness of God.

We may find a third in the truth that, when God does reward us either for services executed or for services and desires intended but not carried out, He rewards us very

¹¹ Psalm x. 17.

far beyond the deserts of the actions or desires themselves. It is true that the glory of Heaven is spoken of in Scripture as a reward in the sense of a thing deserved, but it does not follow that the measure of recompence does not far exceed the work done, although there may be some proportion between the two. Our Lord in His parables represents the rewards of the faithful servants as something far transcending the labours which they have undergone. They have been faithful over a few things, and they are made rulers over many things, and St. Paul says expressly, ‘that which is at present momentary and light of our tribulation, worketh for us above measure exceedingly an eternal weight of glory.’¹² And he says in another place, ‘I reckon that the sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared to the glory to come which shall be revealed in us.’¹³ And it is difficult to conceive how any earthly work can merit perfectly and adequately an eternal reward.

Another consideration from which we may see the boundless mercifulness of God is to be found in His ways of dealing with those whom yet He is forced to punish. In the first place, God waits most patiently for the conversion of every sinner. This patience of His is often a stumbling block to those who love Him, and who seem to find it inexplicable. St. Peter dwells on this difficulty in his second Epistle. He says, ‘Of this one thing be not ignorant, my beloved, that one day with the Lord is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord delayeth not His promise, as some imagine, but dealeth patiently for your sake, not willing that any should perish, but that all should return to penance.’¹⁴ He goes on just after, bidding them

¹² 2 Cor. iv. 17.

¹³ Romans viii. 18. ¹⁴ 2 St. Peter iii. 8, 9.

‘account the longsuffering of the Lord, salvation,’ that is, consider it as affording greater opportunities to sinners to save their souls. Thus the chastisement of the world by the Flood was put off at least a hundred years from the beginning of the preaching of penance by Noe, the Egyptians were not finally overwhelmed until God had over and over again given them opportunities of changing their mode of action towards the chosen people, Saul was allowed to reign on many years after he had been rejected by God, and our Lord shewed the utmost possible forbearance in giving Judas every occasion of repentance. It is true that sinners are sometimes cut short in their career of evil, but that may be in particular cases, in which God sees that they would get more hardened if they were permitted a longer life, or in which the interests of the Kingdom of God require a swifter punishment on His enemies. For as it is an exercise of mercy to wait for those who may perhaps repent, it is also an exercise of mercy to cut short the life of those who will only use a greater length of years to heap up for themselves a more intense and terrible punishment in the next world. With this limitation, it may be said that God is ordinarily marvellous indeed in His patience in awaiting the repentance of His enemies.

We may place under the same head another truth of which there are numberless examples—namely, that God not only awaits the repentance of the sinner, but also sends him many forewarnings of the coming punishment which will fall on him if he does not repent. We have examples of this rule of God’s government in the warnings addressed to the world by those of which mention has already been made, in the warning of the Ninivites and so many of the wicked kings of Judah or Israel in the sacred history. And certainly our Lord

seems to have been continually taking occasion to warn Judas of his danger, while the last prophecy, delivered by Him on the Mount of Olives, is a long warning of the signs which will be vouchsafed before the final Day of Judgment. And it is probable that, when the secret history of souls comes to be known on that last day, one of the most marvellous of the revelations, then to be made, will be that of the numberless secret warnings which it will then be found that God has addressed to all in His particular providence, and then also that other saying of the Fathers and the Church will be found most wonderfully true, that God never deserts any one by the total withdrawal of grace, until the sinner has first entirely deserted God.

We pass on to another part of the subject, that, namely, which relates to the measure with which God treats those whom He actually punishes, either in this world or in the world to come. Of such the Psalmist says : 'He had not dealt with us according to our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities,'¹⁵ that is, even when God punishes, when the time for patience and warning is passed, and nothing remains for Him but to punish, He is still, even in punishing, mindful of mercy, because He punishes less severely than the deserts of the sinner would require in strict justice. It is true that we are taught that the measure of punishment, like that of reward, is in proportion to that of the guilt, as that is in proportion to the measure of the virtue which is crowned. Yet the justness of proportion does not exclude a difference in the quantity and intensity. Thus St. Augustine, commenting on the verse of the Psalm,¹⁶ 'Will God forget to show mercy, or will He in His anger shut up His mercies?' says that the words refer to the elect and not to the reprobate, but

¹⁵ Psalm cii. 10.

¹⁶ Psalm lxxvi. 10.

that they may be understood even of the latter, in the sense that while the eternal wrath of God abides on them, yet still He does not restrain His mercies, even in that wrath of His, inasmuch as He causes them not to suffer all that they deserve in the way of torment, not that they are ever to be without their punishment or that that will ever finish, but that they may suffer in a less degree of severity than they have deserved. And other writers say that, even in the Day of Judgment, God will not visit sins according to the full measure of the wrath which they have provoked in Him, but will judge with comparative leniency, otherwise the wicked would be entirely destroyed. It is easy to understand that in this world God does not punish sins as they deserve, but it is the opinion of theologians that He will not do so even in the next world.

Another proof of the extreme mercifulness of God is to be found in the conditions on which He forgives sin. For He is content with the simple act of contrition, which has the power of restoring the soul at once to His favour and love. In the case of the diseases and ailments of the body it is thought well if health be regained gradually and after a long course of treatment, but in the case of sin, which is the death rather than the disease of the soul, life and health are regained at once by the act of contrition. It is nothing but an internal act, it is made in a moment, and yet it is enough to turn the heart of God from anger and hatred to forgiveness and fatherly love, and the forgiveness is so complete that nothing remains of coldness or distance between the God Who has been offended most grievously and the sinner who is now once more His dear child. Our Lord has painted the perfection of this reconciliation in the Parable of the Prodigal Son, and He has told us therein how the extreme indulgence

of the father is enough to move the envy and indignation of those who have never been truants from his love and rule. And yet the truth which He was setting forth in that parable goes beyond even the tender lines in which He has drawn the picture, because He spoke only of one forgiveness, and did not mention the case of the possible relapse of the forgiven Prodigal, over and over again, and the readiness of the great Father of souls to receive again and again His returning child. And, again, the power of contrition is so great that it can extend even to the cancelling of the debt of satisfaction due to the justice of God as well as to the removal of the guilt of the soul, so that it is in itself the forgiveness of pain as well as of guilt, and it is only by the accident, so to say, of the want of perfection in contrition, that there remains any debt at all to be removed by penance. For all that God does is perfect in its kind, and when He forgives, the forgiveness must be complete and absolute, as far as it concerns Him, and it is only in ourselves that the causes of a merely partial forgiveness are to be found.

There are yet three things to be mentioned in connection with this subject of the mercifulness of God in the forgiveness of the sinner. The first is that which has already been partially touched in what has been said about the power which God was ready to give to the intercession of Abraham in the case of the punishment of the Cities of the Plain. Holy Scripture tells us that God would have spared them if there had been in them ten just men. That is, God will take into consideration the merits and the prayers of others who have not offended Him, and will for their sake often spare the wicked for whom they plead, or with whom they may be connected. When we consider the position which the Saints and friends of God occupy in His

Kingdom, we see how marvellous is the provision for the forgiveness of sinners which is thus made. There are several instances in the history of the Old Testament from which we learn how much God regards the influence, so to speak, of His servants. In the Book of Deuteronomy Moses relates how God had, as it were, asked him not to intercede for the people who had sinned in the matter of the golden calves, as if He could not execute vengeance against them if Moses prayed for them. Something like this occurs about the punishment of the sin of Solomon, which was deferred and made less for the sake of his father David. And there are instance in the histories of the saints which seem to show us that it is often the case that a whole city or country is spared for the sake of some one holy person.

These mercies are instances, of course, of the averting of temporal punishments of sin for the sake of the saints. It may be thought that the same thing cannot be said of the punishments of sin in the next world, and that even in this there may be cases in which not the merits and intercession of the saints would be enough to avert the chastisement which is deserved by sin. Certainly there are such cases, and of such the Prophet Ezechiel speaks when he declares that even if Noe, Daniel, and Job were in the land which God had determined to chastise, they would save only their own souls by their justice and not the souls of sons or daughters.¹⁷ This is certainly true, and yet it remains true that God is wonderfully indulgent for the sake of His saints, and most of all for the sake of His most beloved Son. And we are here led to think of that most merciful provision which has been made in the Church, for the remission of that part of what is owing to God's justice which

¹⁷ Ezech. xiv. 20.

can be remitted in the next world, that is the debt due to His justice, in the way of satisfaction, by the application of the treasures of the merits of our Lord and the Saints by way of Indulgences. This treasure, as it is called, must not be looked upon apart from the persons to whose merits and sufferings it is owing that it exists at all. It has its value in the way of satisfaction in the eyes of God from them, and when it is used for us it is as much a personal tie between us and them, as if their actual intercession had been made available for us at the same time. Our Lord said after His wonderful miracle of the five loaves : ‘Gather up the fragments that remain, lest they be lost.’¹⁸ And although the merits and satisfactions of the saints pass, as we say, into this common treasury, to be applied by the Church in her exercise of the power of the keys, still they are present to the mind of God, not as a confused mass, like the coins which may lie in the stores of some rich King, but as the individual work of this or that soul dear to Him. And when they are made fruitful to us in the way of the forgiveness of our debt to Him, He regards them as they are in His own most faithful remembrance, and it is true to say that the pardon which we obtain is granted by Him for the sake of that one of His servants whom it pleases Him thus to honour by the remission of pain for his sake. In this sense we may compare the treasure of the Church which is applied to us in this way to some very magnificent Cathedral, the work of successive generations of devout Christians, who have gone before us in the faith. We kneel beneath lofty vaults and before marble shrines, glittering with gold and the choicest works of art ; the light streams on us through glorious windows, gemmed with all the hues of the rainbow, there are magnificent chalices and gorgeous

¹⁸ St. John vi.

vestments, and provision made for the music and incense and the support of the clergy and singers who minister in that great pile. We know not who it is that has provided all this for the glory of God and the benefit of the souls of His people, but in His sight all is stored up. Not an hour of work, not a single sacrifice of the good things of this world, not one aspiration of penitence or of devotion is lost to Him, and those who have in any way contributed to providing all this for His service, have a share, in His Eternal Kingdom, in all the good that goes on in the pile that has been raised from generation to generation. And if we have so many things told us in the Sacred Scriptures with regard to the immense weight with Him of the intercession of His servants while on earth, it is but reasonable to consider that He will grant very great remissions indeed for their sake, in the way of which we are speaking, remissions corresponding far more nearly to the love which He bears to them and to the value which He attaches to their prayers when accompanied by satisfaction, than to the intrinsic value of the work which the Church may select as the condition on which we are to be made partakers of the benefit which is thus to be gained. Thus the mercifulness shown in the provision for the remission of pain by means of Indulgences is a part, and a most integral part, of the great and most loving provision of God's mercy in the institution of the Sacrament of Penance itself.

When we are counting up the chief instances of the mercifulness of God in regard of sin and sinners, we cannot of course leave out that immense work of His love, in the creation of Purgatory. For Purgatory is a provision for discharging the debt due to His justice by those countless thousands—as we may believe them to be—who pass out of this world, generation after

generation, in the state of grace, and yet without having paid the full satisfaction which they owe to His justice. No one but God Himself could have contrived a plan by which His justice should be thus satisfied at the cost of a delay in entering Heaven in those who, without this arrangement, could never enter it at all. And we may say much the same of that other contrivance of His love in which He makes the sufferings of this life, which are involuntary in those on whom they fall, and which, if they were dependent on the will of men, might never have been undergone, still as valuable to the souls who bear them patiently as if they were so much most severe penance. For in this way not only are the sufferings of Purgatory immensely diminished in many cases, both because many souls are preserved from sin by means of sufferings here below, and because of the satisfactory power of these involuntary penances, as they may be called, but in many cases also it may be supposed that souls are enabled to pass at once into Heaven without any further suffering at all. It is the doctrine of many holy writers that corporal austerities, when performed in the true spirit of penitence and humility, are the safest means in our power for the perfect satisfaction of the debt which we owe to the justice of God. But so many souls there are who shrink from this voluntary self-chastisement, that there might be far fewer than there are who pass to Heaven without experience of the fires of Purgatory, except some very short suffering, if it were not for the good Providence of our Heavenly Father, Who so tempers the ordinary ills of this life to us as to let us make amends to Him without being obliged to exhibit the heroic courage of the saints, by simply and thankfully bearing what we cannot avoid, aided by His grace so as not to murmur or repine under His hand,

and thus paying, at a very slight cost, a debt which it would be very hard to pay in full in the far greater sufferings of the next world.

These considerations may serve to set before us some at least of the measures of the mercifulness of God which may be more or less imitated by us in our dealings one with another. They may be summed up under three heads. The first of these may be, God's proneness to mercy rather than to revenge, or whatever may come under the general head of revenge, whether in judgment or in word or in action. The second head may be that of the extreme munificence of God in rewarding and acknowledging any service that is done to Him, and the third may be that of His immense tenderness and mercifulness in the treatment of those who have offended Him, or are about to offend Him. We cannot certainly in all these ways follow the example set before us, for it does not depend on us to be as magnificent as God is in those dealings with enemies of which we have been speaking. Still, we have every reason to imitate Him in very great proneness to mercy of every kind, rather than to the infliction of anything like revenge. The saints have been marvellous in the exultation with which they have found out every reason for favourable judgments, kind words, or beneficent actions, and we may add that they have shown themselves the children of God in their overflowing gratitude for any slight benefit they may have received. And our Lord seems to lead our thoughts to more than one manner in which we may emulate the mercifulness of God in the words which immediately follow, and which we have no good reason for separating from those on which we have been commenting. For after saying, 'Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful,' He goes on at once, 'Judge not and you shall not be judged, condemn

not and you shall not be condemned, forgive and you shall be forgiven, give and it shall be given to you, and the rest. Thus it seems as if in those four things at least our Lord means us to imitate our Father's mercifulness—in restraining from judgment, in restraining from condemnation, in forgiving offences against ourselves, and lastly in giving to others according to our opportunities. These at least, then, are matters as to which the example of God may be followed by us, and at the same time we may consider that in these four things, or rather in the reward that corresponds to them, as He goes on to explain, we may find the second of the motives which He has suggested above for that great charity and mercy which He recommends in this part of the Sermon on the Plain. For He gave two reasons for this charity, that we should be the children of the Highest, and that our reward should be great. We have been endeavouring to draw out some of the features of this example of God, which is thus set before us, and we may proceed in the next chapter to consider the question of the great reward which is promised to us if we act as His children in this respect.

CHAPTER VIII.

Measure for Measure.

St. Luke vi. 37, 38; *Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 48.

THE four precepts which are now added by our Lord to His exhortation to the imitation of the mercifulness of God, may be considered as so many explanations given us of what that mercifulness is, or at least of those features in it which are capable of imitation by us. Or they may be considered as setting before us certain great elements of the reward which has been promised to us, if we are perfect in the practice of this precept of charity. There is yet a third manner of regarding the passage on which we are now to comment. In the former verses our Lord has insisted on the practice of charity, and, in order to that, of patience and of munificence. He now adds another virtue, that of mercy, in the matters which are presently to be mentioned, as a further aid to the practice of the charity on which He is mainly insisting. It will be well to keep this threefold line of explanation before the mind in the comments which we are about to make on this passage, although we incline, as has been said, to consider that the thought of the reward which is here promised to the merciful, and which has not hitherto been explained by anything that our Lord has said, is the dominant thought in the whole context.

It cannot be doubted, in any case, that the example of God is most clear and precise in regard of the four

matters on which our Lord now speaks. It is certainly quite true that God does not judge, that He does not condemn, that He forgives, and that He gives with a largeness and bountifulness of which there is no other example. In this sense the commentary of those who regard these words as explanations of the preceding injunction of the imitation of our Father's mercifulness, is undoubtedly well founded in the words of the text: 'Judge not and you shall not be judged, condemn not and you shall not be condemned, forgive and you shall be forgiven, give and it shall be given to you, good measure and pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall they give into your bosom.' He then gives the reason for this, which is a principle and a law of God's dealings with His rational creatures, in the words which conclude the passage: 'For with the same measure that you shall mete withal, it shall be measured to you again.' We shall presently speak of the principle, after saying a few words on the four heads under which our Lord ranges the exercise of the mercifulness which He recommends to us.

In the first place, then, we are told not to judge, and that if we do not judge, we shall not be judged. How is this injunction a command to imitate God? God is certainly the judge of all and He will not forbear, in due time, to execute the office of our Judge. That will be at the end of the season of probation, of which the present stage of the history of the world consists. In the meanwhile, God seems to adjourn as far as possible the judgment of man. His great gentleness in this respect is conspicuous in the Scripture history of the fall of our first parents, in which it seems as if God were described as giving them every opportunity of seeking for pardon, before He passed on them the sentence which had been threatened, and of explaining what they

had done in a manner to win forgiveness. God does not reproach and sentence them till they have condemned themselves out of their own mouths. The same thing may be remarked in our Lord's conduct to the poor woman taken in the act of adultery, for He would not condemn her. And with regard to the whole race of mankind, God has so far forbore from judgment and condemnation, as to provide, at the cost of the death of His own Son on the Cross, for the perfect condonation and cancelling of all offences. With regard to ourselves, this precept certainly forbids the whole habit of passing even only interior judgments on one another, to which we are so prone, and this on the ground which has been explained in the commentary on the same precept in the Sermon on the Mount, namely, that we have no jurisdiction over the actions or motives of others, as we have over our own by the gift of conscience. God alone is the Judge of men, and He alone can see that which gives their true character to all that is said and thought and done, that is the heart, which no one but He can read. If He Who is thus the natural judge of men, is yet so slow in exercising His right of judgment, His example comes with twofold weight upon us who have no such right. It is true that there are many cases in which we are allowed, or enjoined to a certain extent, to form an opinion on the external acts of which we can take cognizance, but in these cases a kind of jurisdiction is conferred on certain persons for the good of society, or the Church, or the family or community, as the case may be, or even for the good of the person himself who judges or is judged. And if we are not to judge, much less are we to condemn. Condemnation implies a complete cognizance of the case, so far as it is subject to punishment of any kind whatsoever, even to that only

which consists in the verdict of the individual mind which condemns another as guilty of this or that crime. Condemnation follows on judgment as the sentence on the verdict in a case of human justice, and is therefore distinct from it. Strictly speaking, to pass in our minds an absolutely favourable judgment on another is as much an exercise of jurisdiction as to pass an unfavourable judgment. We have in neither case the right or the capacity. But to condemn is to carry out our unfavourable judgment to the final issue of the allotment of the retribution due to guilt, and this is specially forbidden us, whereas we are not forbidden to deal out to men the good which may correspond to the favourable judgment which we may have formed of them.

The promise here made by our Lord to those who will fulfil this heavenly precept is very great indeed. Those who do not judge will not be judged, and those who do not condemn will not be condemned. St. Paul, in the Epistle to the Romans,¹ speaks in a way which may illustrate at least a part of the meaning of this great promise. He says, ‘Thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest, for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself, for thou dost the same things which thou judgest.’ For there is a peculiar sentence in reserve for those who judge others, in the sense in which the words are here used, inasmuch as it is worse to do what we condemn in others, and the fact that we have judged these things in others shows that we are without all excuse on the score of ignorance ourselves. In this sense the judgment and the condemnation which we escape by forbearance with others in these matters, is the judgment and condemnation of those who know what is wrong and condemn it in others, and yet do it themselves. But this would hardly be enough

¹ Chap. ii.

to satisfy the full meaning of the words of the passage before us. They seem to mean, not, certainly, that if we refrain from judging and condemning, God will altogether refrain from judging us and from passing the condemnation which truth and justice may require, on what is amiss in us as such, but that He will in His judgment of us take into consideration our observance of this commandment as a circumstance in our favour, just as He will take the circumstance of readiness in judgment and condemnation of others into account, against those who do not keep this precept, and that on that account His judgment of us will be as favourable as if we had not offended Him. For He will count our mercifulness to others as a sufficient satisfaction for what we have done ourselves, and thus the severe judgment and condemnation which we might otherwise have merited will not be passed on us. This is as if no judgment and condemnation at all were to be passed.

It would of course be foolish to understand those words as meaning, what would be subversive of the whole system of God's government of the world, that if we do not repent of our own sins we shall be forgiven them for the sake of our mercifulness to the sins, as they might seem to us, of others, but that, if we do not judge, we shall very easily find the grace of penitence, and that the punishment due to our offences will be cancelled by our own mercifulness. And in the same way when it is added, 'Forgive and it shall be forgiven,' it is not meant that the simple forgiveness of the offences of others will be enough to cancel unrepented sins of our own, but that the forgiveness of the offences of others is the condition on which we shall ourselves find pardon, when we come to seek it in the right way and in the proper dispositions, and those dispositions will be very easily secured by those who practise forgiveness towards

others, whereas the unforgiving will never be able to gain them. And He adds, ‘Give and it shall be given to you,’ going on in that beautiful way of His to set the bountifulness of His Father before us in the fullest outline, ‘good measure, and pressed down, and shaken together, and running over shall they give into your bosom.’ The image is taken from the manner in which ample measure is given of corn or some other valuable which is contained in large chests or baskets, when first of all the measure is true and large in itself, then the grain is pressed down, in order that still more may be given, then shaken together in order that all the corners and chinks may be filled up, and finally made to run over the sides of the measure, till it is no longer possible to add anything more. Such is the magnificence of God in returning, to those who keep this precept of charity and mercifulness, the good with which they have honoured Him in its observance. This is the reward of which mention was made just before this passage, a reward of which our Lord Himself says that it shall be great indeed. And He adds, as has been said, the principle of the Divine government of the world of which this promise is an exemplification, ‘for with the same measure that you shall mete withal, it shall be measured to you again.’

It would not be difficult to draw out the series of precepts of which we have now reached, as it were, the final strain, in two parallel stanzas, so to speak, answering the one to the other as the strophe and antistrophe of a Greek chorus. The first series would begin with the precept of love to enemies, and end with the maxim in which our rules for dealing with others are summed up in the words, ‘As you would that men should do to you, do you also to them in like manner.’ And the second would begin a little further on, where, after having

explained that it is of no merit to love those who love us in return, and the like, our Lord once more begins as before, ‘Love ye your enemies,’ and the rest. This stanza or strophe would continue as far as the words on which we are now engaged, ‘For with what measure you shall mete withal it shall be measured to you again.’ In each case the concluding sentence would form a climax, in the first strophe summing up the whole series of rules for our own conduct to others, and in the second strophe summing up the rule by which God acts in His dealings with us, as our Lord and Judge. In each case the concluding climax would be the most important part of the whole series of precepts or injunctions. And there is an obvious connection and correspondence between these two maxims, of our own conduct and of the conduct of God. For in the first case we are told to make our own desires the rule of our dealings with others, and in the second case we are taught that God will make our own line of conduct to others the rule of His treatment of ourselves. Thus the second maxim adds the sanction for and the reason of the first, and we are taught to treat others as we should wish them to treat us, because God will treat us as we treat them. There is a certain obvious equity and rightfulness about the first maxim, it is in accordance with reason and a right intelligence of our position one to another in society, that we should do as we would be done by. But it is far more important that we should know that this rule of conduct has a far higher and deeper reason and sanction than anything which might be recognised as ‘becoming’ by the foolish speculators who do not believe in a God, in a future world, in conscience, or duty, or the objective difference between right and wrong. It is most important that the whole truth should be before us as to the issues which are

involved in our rules of treatment one of another, and this is supplied by the second of these two maxims, of which we are now speaking, that according to our own measure it shall be meted to us again by God.

It has been said more than once, in the course of our considerations on this Sermon, that it is addressed, in great part, to persons not so far advanced in the school of our Lord as those who formed the audience in the case of the Sermon on the Mount. If this is so, we should naturally expect to find that our Lord does not appeal to principles or truths which are more or less the exclusive property of the chosen nation, but rather to those truths which belong most properly to natural religion, or, rather, to the original revelation of the Divine laws which was made to man at the beginning of his long pilgrimage through the world. It is remarkable that, in the Sermon on the Mount, our Lord subjoins to the precept on doing to others as we would have them do to us, the words, ‘For this is the Law and the Prophets.’ In the parallel passage in this discourse He omits these words. On the other hand, it is in this Sermon only that He inserts the words on which we are now commenting, which tell us that according to the measure that we mete withal it shall be measured to us again. These words, therefore, are in some sense substituted here for the others about the Law and the Prophets. What is required in order that they may have their full force upon us is, not so much the knowledge of the republication of the natural law which was made to the chosen people on Mount Sinai, as the simple recognition of the law of conscience as a revelation of the will of God, made in the heart of every child of Adam, as a voice which speaks to us with the authority of a sovereign and a Judge, a voice the declarations of which appeal silently and most forcibly to a future vindication of their

authority at the hands of One whose behests cannot be gainsaid. To any one in whom the authority of conscience is a living power, the words of which we speak are very intelligible indeed, and they point to our responsibility, to the future judgment and retribution, to an endless time during which our lot will be that which corresponds to the decisions of that great Day of account. This is all that is necessary in order to give the words of which we are speaking their full weight and authority.

In this sense it is true to say that these words are the most important of the whole context, because the whole of what has gone before is built upon them. Why are we to do all these hard things in the way of charity? Why are we to love our enemies, why are we to bless and benefit those who injure and calumniate us, why are we to pray for those who treat us badly, to do good, hoping for nothing in return here, why are we to pass no judgment on others, nor to condemn them, to forgive and to give freely, and the like? It is because it is the rule of God's government of the world, that on our own action in all these particulars depends the measure with which He will treat us, because that measure is nothing more or less than that which we use in our dealings one with another. We are to do these things, many of them so hard to our poor, narrow, and selfish characters, because if we do them not we shall be in the greatest danger, and if we do them we shall win for ourselves the greatest and happiest security. For it is a truth which we cannot escape, and which we strive in vain to make ourselves forget, that we have an eternity before us, for which this short time of our life here is a preparation, the only preparation which we are allowed to make, and that our condition there, where the joys and the sorrows are so immensely greater and more intense

than any joys or sorrows of this stage of our existence, having besides the terrible quality of immutability when they are once settled for us. Well, by the side of this truth this other is to be placed, that with what measure we mete withal it shall be measured to us again.

Our Lord more than once uses this impersonal form of language, it shall be done to you, it shall be repaid you, it shall be required of you, and the like, and it is usually some rule of the government of God of which He so speaks. For He does not ordinarily mention His Father's name, at least among those who do not love Him much, without some reserve and, as it were, reverence. But He is here certainly speaking of God. He it is Who will measure to us according to the measure with which we mete to others. But it must be remarked that although God deals with us according to our own measure, He does so by taking our measure as the rule of His own, according to the proportion between His own magnificence and the boundlessness of His wealth in every possible kind of good, and our own poor and narrow means of giving and practising mercy. The measure which we mete is the measure of God's dealings with us, but it is in the way of proportion and not of exact correspondence. It is as if some rich father of earth were to give his children a few small and almost worthless coins, and to reward them according to the use which they make of them by giving them an immense treasure of the purest gold for the good use of each single farthing. No comparison of this kind can come up to the difference between the goods with which God rewards the faithfulness on earth of His children, because there is more proportion between the finest gold and the most worthless dross here, than between earthly goods and eternal goods, spiritual goods and the goods which we

call such in relation to this life. This is partly hinted at by our Lord, when He speaks of the good measure heaped up and pressed down and shaken together and running over, which shall be given into our bosom. So again He tells His Apostles, at a later date, that they and all who have left earthly things to follow Him, shall have a hundredfold in this present life, not meaning that the reward shall be paid in exactly the very same things that have been abandoned for God, but that it shall be in the proportion which He names.

This then is the law of His Father's Providence, with which our Lord closes this great teaching on the subject of charity, and which He assigns as the sufficient motive and reason for the conduct which He has been recommending. And we may surely think that the simple enunciation of this most loving and wise law must have been an immense consolation to the Sacred Heart of our Lord, which was always occupied in the grateful contemplation of the works and ways of God in His dealings with the creation which He has made, and into which He had Himself come down, in order to give to its Creator and Lord the glory and the homage, the love and gratitude, which were due to Him. And if our Lord could have been carried away by sanguine hopes as to the correspondence of mankind to the bountiful arrangements of their God, if He had not known, as St. John says of Him, what was in man, He might, as we may think, have been filled with the greatest possible joy, not only at the law itself according to which God had determined to deal with men, but also at the prospect which might have opened itself before Him, of the great glory to God which this rule of action would produce, and the wonderful riches and blessings which men would thus win for themselves by their use of the bountiful measure which was to be dealt to

them, and which, in truth, opened the whole of the infinite treasures of God's Kingdom to them at their will. If men care to be dealt with by their Heavenly Father according to their own measure, then there is nothing that they may not win from God. They have themselves to fix the amount of the blessings which are to be theirs. They have but to set the rule themselves, what God is to give and to forgive, how liberally He is to pour forth on them what He has to bestow, how completely He is to cancel any debts which they may owe to His justice, how far He is to exert His infinite power in making them eternally happy, all this is simply in their own hands. A rule such as this is nothing more or less than an invitation to them, to say how and where their lot is to be cast in His Kingdom hereafter.

When we come to dwell a little more carefully on this great law of the Kingdom of God, we see how perfectly it provides for the utmost possible happiness, even here, both of mankind in general and of each individual soul. For God loves men, not only singly and one by one—though He loves them and provides for them in this way as if each single soul was the universe itself to Him, as if He had nothing else to watch over and to care for, nothing else to redeem, nothing else to glorify. He is the Author of human society as well as the Father and Creator of men, one by one. And, supposing man to have faith in His promises and intelligence of this law which He has made, as the rule of His judgment of men at that final day to which all consciences instinctively look forward—that is, supposing men to believe concerning Him those elementary truths alone of which St. Paul speaks when he says that those who come to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that seek Him—nothing more than this law is wanted to secure the absolute happiness and

well being of that system, of His contrivance and institution, which we call human society. For if this law were the living and directing power by which the conduct of men was ruled, society would consist of a multitude of brethren each one anxious to secure for himself the greatest possible blessings hereafter by the most loving possible treatment now of every one who came in his way. The more occasions there were for the practice of kindness and benevolence, the greater would be the eagerness of men to use them for the securing of the benevolence and love of their Heavenly Father. The poor, the weak, the miserable, the afflicted in all possible phases and forms of misery and calamity, would be sought out, and treasured, and made much of, as the greatest benefactors and blessings. In such a society men would be avaricious of nothing so much as of opportunities of doing good. They would be ambitious of spending themselves and all they have in charity to others, with an ambition more eager and more consuming than that which now drives them to so many excesses of cruelty and injustice. The war of class against class would only exist in a rivalry of beneficence and loving service. The good things of this world would only be valued in proportion as they could be got rid of in the cause of good and the relief of want. Power, rank, and position would be used with the utmost devotion for the common good, and the men who were tempted to hoard and keep for themselves would not only be known as public enemies, but as enemies of their own souls as well as of the happiness of others. Nothing more than this law is required to make earth an antechamber of Heaven.

It is of course only too plain that men have not the faith sufficient for the realization of such prospects as

this, and we may well feel sure that our Lord did not indulge in any anticipations of perfection in human society which left out of sight the blindness, and the folly, and the selfishness, of the members of that society. But it is well to pause a moment before proceeding, to remark that this rule of God's action is no fiction of imagination, no dream of an enthusiast, but a simple truth, and that God cannot have meant it to be forgotten or ignored in the social life of mankind. And, just as the simple truth of the supremacy of conscience, according to our faithfulness to which we shall ultimately be judged, and by nothing else, answers all the complaints which are so commonly made about the severe conditions on which salvation seems to be promised—as if it were beyond the reach of the great majority of mankind—so does this law of God for the government of the world answer all the difficulties which are so commonly felt about the hardness of the social system under which men have to live. Something has already been said on this subject in the remarks made on the Sermon on the Mount, but here we may add that it is the failure of men to observe the commandments of God, with regard one to another, which causes all the social miseries and dangers of which we hear so much. Society is a Divine institution, and on this truth rests our duty of civil allegiance and of submission to the laws and the government under which we live. On this truth rests the other truth, that to conspire against society, to break the law, to rebel, to violate the rights of property as settled by law, to set class against class, in the same community, and the like, are so many sins against God, the Author of Society, as well as transgressions of merely human law and the rights of others. This is all true, and it is a truth that in our days is too often forgotten by those who find themselves hardly or even

tyrannically treated by the legal or social system under which they live. The doctrine of St. Paul that ‘there is no power but of God, and those that are, are ordained by God. Therefore he that resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God, and they that resist purchase to themselves damnation,’¹ has to be again and again proclaimed by the Church, even to children of her own in various nations who have too much provocation to forget it.

But this truth is not the only truth to which attention is due on the part of rulers and subjects, and various classes of society. It is also true that God has established society, not simply as the laws of nature are imposed on the physical creation,—to be followed by necessity which the creatures cannot escape, but as an institution for free and intelligent beings who know that they have a future before them, a judgment to undergo, a reward to win, a responsibility which they cannot avoid, and a time of probation which is soon to be at an end. On such beings, no compulsion can be exercised to make them keep the laws which are fraught with so many blessings to themselves, both as individuals and as members of society. Men have made of these laws much what they have made of all the other provisions of God’s merciful love towards them. That is, they have violated them outrageously, whenever such violation was counselled by their own passions or their own interests, and the social world is in consequence the jungle of noxious weeds, each striving to choke the other in the struggle for life, which it is, instead of the fair garden of charity and mutual assistance which God destined it to be. The Church upholds the principles on which society was first established by its Maker, but she cannot save the

¹ Romans xiii. 1, 2.

world from the consequences of the continual departure, on the part of ruling and privileged classes and individuals, from the law which God intended to guide their actions with regard to others, less outwardly favoured than themselves. In this case, also, men reap what they have sown and they receive the measure which they have dealt out to others. At this moment, the civilised world is full of dethroned sovereigns, or the innocent representatives of dethroned sovereigns, and they, as well as the nations which have discarded them, are suffering from the consequences of a long series of abuses of power and unfaithfulnesses to the highest trusts, on the part of those whose titles they inherit, while they are, in truth, expiating their crimes. What has happened to royal houses has also happened to whole classes, which in various countries have had large powers and privileges committed to them by Providence, powers which they have misused, and privileges which they have prostituted to the most unworthy purposes and aims. Retribution has come on them in due course, by the permission of Providence. It is shortsighted and foolish to attribute the evils under which society groans in times like our own, to the immediate authors of the revolutions or wars which have brought about the existing state of things. They have their own burthens to bear before the judgment-seat of God. But their power and success has come, in too many cases, from the faults of those whose legal rights they have trampled under foot—faults which do not justify at once the rebellions or usurpations which have followed on them as their chastisement, but which have generated the miseries and the passions which have caused so much mischief, so as to make men think that the days are at hand, when the whole social fabric is to be destroyed or dissolved. What men sow, that also they reap, and the

harvest is often adjourned, for others who represent them to experience. In this way we see, even in the outward history of the world, an exemplification of the principle here enunciated, that with the measure with which men mete to others it shall be measured to them again.

It is probable that, if we could now read the course of Providence, whether with regard to nations, or to lesser communities, such as families, and the like, which are dealt with in the government of the world as unities, or again, with regard to single persons, we should be surprised to see how uniformly and exactly this law of measure for measure is acted on, in perfect harmony with all the other rules by which Providence acts. And yet, here and now, we can only hope to discern imperfectly that small part of the government of God which is carried out in this life, and in this stage of the history of man. As nothing happens without the arrangement or the permission of God, so nothing may happen to us which has not been, in some way or other, determined or influenced by our own conduct to others. We may remember the case of the hermit in the desert, who said that he had blamed other persons for three faults, and had himself been allowed to fall into just those three same faults. It is certainly constantly to be observed in the history of families, that dutiful children are rewarded by having their own children dutiful to them, while those who have been disobedient or overbearing to their own parents are punished in the same kind themselves, the charitable meet with mercy, the hard-hearted are repaid in kind. These are but instances of the operation of the law of which we are speaking, and it is probably the truth that to the eyes of the Angels a great part of the Providence of God, which it is their continual joy and wonder to gaze upon, is an exemplification of the same rule. It is less important to us,

however, that we should be able to trace, imperfectly as it must now be, the working of this law of retribution in the course of God's Providence, than that we should be practically convinced that the law exists, and that its working is always going on. This conviction would generate in us much of that holy fear of God which is the beginning of true wisdom, and we should deal reverently and carefully with others, in a thousand occasions of every-day life, in which we now conduct ourselves as if they were but of little importance to us. But all our actions are noted in the books of God, and we are thus writing there, hour after hour, what will meet us again, perhaps here, but certainly hereafter, in the form of a return to us of what we have done to others. The lives of the saints are full of the blessedness of kind thoughts, charitable judgments, the mind that will conceive no hard opinion, the heart that is always wishing good, as well as that of the open hand, and the charity that is ever ready to serve others at any cost to itself. But even the lives of the saints can only partially lift the veil which conceals from us the real history of the souls of men, and it will be one of the occupations of eternity to trace the wisdom and beauty of the dealings of God with each single soul, and with the whole race of mankind—wisdom and beauty which are perhaps displayed in nothing more fully than in the way in which, according to the measure which we have used towards others, it is meted to us again.

The present penal condition of human life, and the many seeds of evil which lurk and fructify in every human soul, make it natural that, however large is the sphere open to beneficence in general, a very great part of that range of our conduct to which this rule is applicable should be that of our dealings with others against whom we have some kind of complaint. The forgiveness

of injuries forms the most important subject on which the principle of retribution is brought to bear, both because we have so many occasions of forgiving, and because, from the hardness and littleness of our hearts, we find it so difficult to forgive.

If we compare this passage with the parallel passage in the Sermon on the Mount, from which it is partly taken, we are struck with the greater fulness of development here given to the counsel or precept of forgiveness in particular. Our Lord here insists severally on points which may be said in the Sermon on the Mount to be summed up in the single precept not to judge, in order that we may not be ourselves judged. Here He adds the words against condemnation, and the words also about forgiveness of others. It is very probable that we have here an incidental confirmation of the great and scrupulous accuracy of the Evangelists, and that our Lord may have here added these other words to the passage as it stood in the earlier Sermon, because He does not, in this Sermon, give the form of His own prayer, to which, in the former Sermon, He had subjoined the passage about the necessity of forgiveness, as a comment on the petition that we may be forgiven as we forgive others. It is also likely that the words on the subject of the forgiveness of others are insisted on in the later Sermon, for the sake of the very great importance of this precept for those who are approaching the true faith and the Kingdom of God, as was the case with a great part of the audience on this occasion. In any case, it is well to pause here for a moment and dwell a little more fully on the comments which we find in the Fathers on the extreme importance of the fulfilment of this command.

The comments in question have been collected for us by one of the most eminent among the Catholic writers

on the Gospels, and we shall do little more now than follow his guidance. In the first place, then, Cardinal Toletus tells us that there are three considerations, with regard to God, which have much weight in enforcing this commandment. The first is that, however great may be the offence against ourselves, which we are called on to forgive, it is certain that God has forgiven us offences which are by far greater. This of course is the doctrine insisted on by our Lord Himself in the parable of the Unmerciful Servant, who would not forgive a debt of a hundred pence, when he had just been forgiven by his lord a debt of ten thousand talents. And even this parable of our Blessed Lord is itself an expansion of the idea contained in the words of Ecclesiasticus, ‘Man to man reserveth anger, and doth he seek remedy of God? He hath no mercy on a man like himself, and doth he entreat for his own sins?’² In the second place, we need not make a comparison between our own offences against God and those of our neighbour against ourselves, as if there were an absolute distinction between them, for every offence of our neighbour against us is, at the same time, an offence against God, and a greater offence against God than against ourselves. Yet God is ready to forgive the offence against Himself, which is the largest part of the whole, and it is therefore unreasonable of us to refuse our forgiveness of that lesser part which relates to us. And if our neighbour does not ask our forgiveness, that is little to the point, because God asks for him, and our Lord asks for him also, and therefore we are more than ever bound to remit the debt. In the third place, the author before us places the example of our Lord, Who suffered and suffers, at the hands of men, far greater things than we can suffer at their hands, and yet He forgives absolutely, and has,

² Ecclus. xxviii. 3, 4.

indeed, paid the price of all these offences against Himself.

Toletus adds other considerations, drawn from the precept itself of which we are now speaking. In the first place, he says, it is not a precept which is imposed on us alone, but on all men generally, and so we gain the benefit of it when there is anything which others have to forgive in us. We have a few persons to forgive, and we have perhaps a great many more from whom we need forgiveness. Again, we are not asked to forgive others for their own sakes, but for the sake of God, a motive of infinite power on all reasonable men. The third consideration is that of the immense reward which is to be gained by the exercise of this virtue of the forgiveness of others, and the fourth is, that of the will of God, which is paramount, and has the highest claims on our joyful allegiance and obedience. It has been the will of God that we should suffer this or that, at the hand of one of our brethren. This consideration is the foundation of the conduct of David, when he was cursed by Semei, and would not allow his officers to avenge him. He said, ‘Let him alone, and let him curse, for the Lord hath let him curse David, and who is he that shall say, Why hath He done so? . . . Perhaps the Lord may look upon my affliction, and the Lord may render me good for the cursing of this day.’³

Then there are also other reasons founded on the condition of the person himself who does us any wrong. He is far more injured than we are, he does himself more harm than he does to us, for if he sins, he hurts his own soul, and he cannot hurt ours, except it be that he provokes us to unforgivingness. Again, we do not know that the person who offends us is not to be hereafter our partner in the eternal glories of the next world,

³ 2 Kings xvi. 10.

and it is foolish to expose ourselves to any danger for the sake of not forgiving one who is to be our brother in Heaven. And, again, our neighbour may often intend to hurt us, or do us an injury, while he is in truth our benefactor, and what he does against us turns to our great good. This is often true even of temporal matters, but it is always true of spiritual interests, for any one who does us an injury gives us the precious opportunity of laying up for ourselves a great treasure in Heaven, by our patience and forgivingness, and puts it in our power to cancel an immense amount of our own debt to God, by forgiving him.

Lastly, with regard to ourselves, we must either forgive or not forgive, and if we do not, we injure ourselves far more seriously than our enemy has injured us, or than we can injure him in our measure of vengeance. On the other hand, if we forgive, we conquer our enemy in the noblest and most complete manner. Moreover, the condition of those who are always occupied with the thought and desire of avenging themselves on others, is one of the greatest and most continual torment and anxiety, and we deliver ourselves from this great misery by the simple act of forgiveness, which brings with it so much peace and quiet of soul and of conscience. And, to conclude, we are ourselves debtors in many ways to justice, and it is a benefit when the hard treatment we receive at the hands of any one else, pays off upon us the faults of which our own conscience accuses us.⁴

⁴ See Toletus, *in Luc.* c. vi.

CHAPTER IX.

Blind Guides and Careless Hearers.

St. Luke vi. 39—45; *Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 49.

IT may be remembered that the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount contains a number of topics, the general purport of the whole passage in which they occur being one of warning against dangers to the faith or the practice of the disciples, which our Lord discerned rather, perhaps, as future than as immediately present at the time at which that discourse was delivered. These topics embrace, among other subjects, the narrowness of the way of life, the comparative fewness of those who find it, and the warning against false prophets or teachers who come in the clothing of sheep but are inwardly ravenous wolves. The disciples are warned that they will know these teachers by their fruits, that many will call on our Lord at the Day of Judgment as having taught and worked miracles in His name, of whom He will protest that He never knew them, and the whole Sermon ends with the famous figure or parable of the two foundations, that on the rock and that on the sand. The conclusion of the Sermon on the Plain, of which we are now to speak, is evidently more or less formed on the plan of that of the former Sermon. There is but little in it which has not been said in some way or other, in the Sermon on the Mount, and yet it is most certainly not a repetition of that Sermon. The conclusion of the Sermon on the Plain

begins by what St. Luke calls a similitude or parable, a question by our Lord about the blind leading the blind, which is new in this place, and has no precedent in the earlier discourse. But after this our Lord seems to go back to the former Sermon, and He introduces the passage about the mote in our brother's eye which we are so ready to see, while we have no thought for the beam in our own. Then come some words about the good tree not bringing forth evil fruit, and the rest, which also are taken from the earlier Sermon, and they are followed by some other words about a man bringing forth out of the treasure of his heart things either good or evil according to the character of the heart itself. These are to be found elsewhere in our Lord's teaching, but not in the Sermon on the Mount. The whole discourse ends with the figure of the two foundations, repeated, though not in the same words, from the former Sermon. We have thus some differences to account for, and a question arises as to the exact application of the passages which are here taken from the earlier teaching.

One difference between the Sermon on which we are now commenting, and the Sermon on the Mount, consists in the fact that in the present case we have reason for knowing that our Lord addresses Himself, at different stages of the discourse, to different classes in the audience, whereas we know nothing of the kind in the case of the Sermon on the Mount. If this be so, we can only judge from internal evidence as to the passage now before us, whether the persons addressed are the Apostles, or the disciples properly so called, or the more promiscuous assembly of the people, gathered from all parts, who were present on the occasion, and to whom we have supposed the teaching which immediately precedes these words to have been directed.

In the Sermon on the Mount, the words about the mote and the beam, which are here repeated, are addressed to all the audience, and do not seem to be limited to the Apostles, who were not as yet distinguished so definitely from the common mass of the disciples. It seems, therefore, natural to think that here also the same words are addressed to the whole audience, and not, like the blessings and woes, to a portion only of those who were present.

Again, in the earlier discourse the words about the not gathering grapes from thorns or figs from thistles, which here are repeated, through not quite exactly, follow on the exhortation to beware of false prophets, and the words about the trees and the fruits seem to belong to the same context, and to be uttered with the same purpose. But there is nothing in the present passage which speaks directly of the false prophets, against whom the people are to be on their guard, and whom they are to know by their fruits, unless it be supposed that the words which introduce the whole series of precepts, and in which our Lord speaks, for the first time, as far as we know, of the blind leading the blind, are meant to take the place of the former direct warning against the wolves in the clothing of sheep. If that be so, we may then find reason to follow those commentators on this passage who see in the first part of it a tacit warning against the enemies who were now endeavouring to turn away the disciples of our Lord from His teaching, by false representations concerning Him and His doctrine, while the latter part of the passage, in which the image of the two foundations is repeated, may be supposed to apply more generally to the audience themselves.

The chief difficulty about this interpretation, as far as regards the first part of the passage, which is thus

applied to the Scribes and Pharisees, is, that in the earlier Sermon the warning about the mote and the beam is addressed to all in general, whereas here it would seem to be made particular to the blind guides only. But it may be most safely concluded that the lynxeyed vigilance of the enemies of our Lord in detecting what they considered to be defects in His teaching or in His life, was the result in them of a want of attention to their own faults and to the needs of their own souls generally. There is nothing more certain in the spiritual life, than that inattention to our own faults goes hand in hand with attention to the faults of others, and that those who do not watch over their own consciences are the most vigilant critics of the consciences of others. Thus the warning here would be a particular application of a general danger, an application which not all might at once perceive, but which would be discerned by some, and thus would correspond to the general character of that kind of teaching which our Lord delivered by way of parables or similitudes. This is the more probable as the interpretation of the passage, because the image of the blind leading the blind seems to be usually employed by our Lord in reference to the Pharisees and their influence on the people. Indeed, the image seems to belong to them alone, in our Lord's mouth. It occurs first after this occasion a little later on in the history, where our Lord had been told by the disciples that the Pharisees were scandalized by His teaching as to what truly defiled a man, and He answered, 'Let them alone, they are blind and leaders of the blind.'¹ The same image occurs more than once in our Lord's great denunciation of the Pharisees which is recorded for us by St. Matthew in the twenty-third chapter of his

¹ St. Matt. xv. 14.

Gospel, where he says, ‘Wo to you, blind guides!’ and again, ‘Blind guides! who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel.’ And the same epithet of blindness is used of them in other parts of the same discourse also. Indeed this blindness of His chief enemies is perhaps the one point of all in their condition on which our Lord most frequently dwells, as He said after the miracle on the man born blind, ‘For judgment I am come into this world, that they who see not may see, and that they who see may become blind.’² And it is remarkable that St. Paul, in the passage to the Romans which has already been referred to as illustrating this chapter, uses this same image, as if he had had the words of our Lord in his mind, for he addresses the Jew who was so ready to judge others in the words, ‘If thou art called a Jew, and restest in the Law, and makest thy boast of God, and knowest His will, and approvest the more profitable things, being instructed in the Law, art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind and a light of them that sit in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of the ignorant, having the form of knowledge and of fruit in the Law—thou therefore that teachest another, teachest not thyself!’³ and the rest. St. Paul seems to draw out, as if they were very familiar indeed to him, the subjects of self-congratulation of the learned teachers of the Law, who despised the poor Gentiles, and he dwells on them, one after the other, in the true manner of a rhetorician. But there is hardly an idea in what he says which is not contained, in its germ, in the simple expression of our Lord here, where He calls them the blind leaders of the blind.

There seems, therefore, to be considerable reason for thinking, with the commentators already referred to,

² St. John ix. 39.

³ Romans ii. 17.

that the words on which we are now engaged contain a tacit reference to the teachers of the Law, who were now ranging themselves so decidedly against the new Kingdom of God. At the same time, it is very remarkable that our Lord takes great pains, as it appears, to veil this reference from the eyes of the multitude, and also to cast His denunciation, so to call it, into such a shape as to make it apply generally, as well as to the Scribes and Pharisees. For, true as it seems to be, that their blindness to the lamentable state of their own souls was the original cause and root first of their rejection of Him, and afterwards of their persecution and murder of Him, because, but for that blindness they might have joined the multitude who accepted the teaching of penance and the Baptism of St. John—and again, that this blindness led them to be so keenly on the look out for the defects of others in general—still this doctrine is universal and applicable to all alike, to the people as well as to their blind leaders, and even to the Apostles themselves, the masters and teachers in the school which our Lord Himself founded. And we see afterwards, that the actual fall of Judas was at last consummated by an exercise on his part of a hard criticism on the devout and magnificent action of Magdalénē in her second anointing of our Lord. Thus we may consider that, in this part of the Sermon on the Plain, we have at once a warning against the false teachers, a warning, also, for all who might ever be teachers in the Church, and an instruction to the audience in general which was not to be neglected even by those most far advanced in spirituality. For it is not easy to think that, if these words of our Lord were meant simply to reflect on the miserable condition of the teachers who were now opposing themselves to Him, they would have been preserved to us to remain in

the Church for all time, long after these teachers are passed away. They must have been meant even for the Apostles, for the crowd of the disciples, and for all the hearers in general. And the parabolic form of teaching seem to have been adopted, in this instance also, for the very reason that it would admit of so wide an application of the words.

'And He spoke also to them a similitude: Can the blind lead the blind? Do they not both fall into the ditch? The disciple is not above his master, but every one shall be perfect, if he shall be as his master.' This is a general truth in all moral as well as in intellectual matters, that a man can only give what he has himself, he can only teach what he knows, he can only form others on the lines, so to say, on which he himself is formed. But it is much more true in moral matters, and above all, in spiritual matters, than in any other. For these require the assistance of Divine grace to secure the safe and efficient conveyance, to the mind and soul of the disciple, of the truths and principles which the master has to teach. God may sometimes use the teaching of those who do not live up to it, for the good of others, but His grace cannot be reckoned on in such cases. And again, there is always an unreality about teaching which is not the reflection of the life of the teacher, and this is felt instinctively by the disciple. Thus neither does the teacher teach with any spirit and earnestness what he does not himself practise, nor does the disciple take in, with docility and confidence, the doctrines and rules which are not practically efficient on the life and heart of his master. The highest thing that can be hoped for in all such cases is that the disciple should attain to the same proficiency and perfection as his master. In the case in which the master is the simple organ of the system

of instruction in which he is set to teach, he can hand on, traditionally and mechanically, the truths and principles which are confided to him, as a book can convey to the mind of the reader the thoughts of its author. In this way the Scribes and Pharisees themselves were able to teach rightly, as our Lord said afterwards to the people concerning them, that as they sat in the chair of Moses, it was right to observe and do all that they commanded them, but they were not to do after their works, for they said and did not.⁴ In such matters as those of which He spoke, these men were like sign-posts to show the way, which they did not follow along themselves.

This then is the first principle which our Lord here lays down as a general truth, having in His mind, no doubt, the false teaching of which there was so much danger in the case of the multitudes to whom He was speaking, while at the same time the maxim which He uttered was to be valuable in the Church to all time. For whenever spirituality and morality die out in a community or in a Christian population, the root of the evil is to be traced to the defects of various kinds, which are to be found in the religious teachers of that community or population. It is not always the case that the most perfect of teachers can raise those whom they teach to their own high level, but it is ordinarily and generally the case that imperfect teachers cannot raise any of their disciples above their own level. To our Lord, as we know, the people among whom He went about teaching were as sheep without shepherds. This is the description given by St. Matthew, who so seldom inserts any reflection of his own into his history. Before he relates the choosing and the sending forth of the Apostles, he says, ‘And seeing the multitudes, He had compassion on

⁴ St. Matt. xxiii. 2, 3.

them, because they were distressed and lying like sheep that have no shepherd.⁵ He knew the needs of their souls, and that they had no one among their ordinary teachers to supply those needs. But those needs could never be supplied under any circumstances, unless they were furnished with a class of teachers who would be, in the first instance, living embodiments of the teaching committed to them for the benefit of others. Thus the maxim which is, in the first instance, a reflection on the incapacity of the Pharisees to lead the people aright, becomes a note of warning to all Christian teachers in the Church of God. They must practise what they teach, and live up to what they preach, otherwise they will run the risk of being themselves blind leaders of the blind. Thus we find it recorded, as a special praise, of several of the saints of God, that they never taught to anyone a practice or rule which they had not first put in execution themselves. It need not be pointed out to what a height of perfection this habit must raise their teaching, nor, on the other hand, how arduous becomes the office of teacher when this perfection is laid down as an essential requisite in anyone who is to hold that office with hope of success. It is in truth this defect that paralyses so much learning and intellectual pre-eminence in the case of many Christian teachers, and makes so many men of great capacity so entirely unfruitful in their labours for souls.

'And why seest thou the mote in thy brother's eye, but the beam that is in thy own eye thou considerest not? Or how canst thou say to thy brother, Brother, let me pull the mote out of thy eye, when thou thyself seest not the beam in thy own eye? Hypocrite! cast first the beam out of thy own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to take out the mote from thy brother's eye.' The words

⁵ St. Matt. ix. 36.

here are altogether general, and as has been said, they occur in the Sermon on the Mount, where they do not appear to be directed to any special class of the hearers. They touch, indeed, on a tendency from which no class of Christians is altogether free, the tendency to be very sharpsighted in regard of the defects of others. We are all continually inclined to remark on the faults of our neighbours, and at the same time to be blind to our own greater defects. But if we consider the whole of this context together, it will seem most probable that our Lord had here also in His mind the teachers of whom He was speaking in the words which immediately precede. It seems as if it was meant that we should understand that there was in them another defect, still more mischievous than that of which mention had just been made, that is, the defect of an inferior degree of spiritual perfection, which prevented them from raising their disciples to any high level in spirituality. They were not only blind, but they were also too sharpsighted at the same time. They were blind to the high ranges of perfection to which they ought to have led the people, and at the same time they were sharpsighted to faults in others, while they paid no attention to their own greater failings. This was something more than to be simply ignorant of much which it would have been for the common good that they should have known.

If we look through the passages in the Gospel history in which the character of the Scribes and Pharisees is drawn by our blessed Lord, we shall find that the fault of which there is mention in the passage before us is certainly one of the most prominent, if not the one most prominent, of all that are there attributed to them. They are the persons who find fault with our Lord for one line of conduct in dealing with men, and with St. John Baptist for another. They are the persons who cannot

bear the laxity of the Master Who allowed His disciples to pluck and rub in their hands the ears of corn on the Sabbath day, and who objected to Him even because He wrought on that day some marvellous miracles of mercy. They are the critics who find fault with the disciples for eating with unwashed hands, and with our Lord for allowing the innocent praises of the children crying in the Temple. They insisted on the payment of tithes of the smallest herbs, mint, and anise, and cummin, while they neglected the weightier things of the Law, judgment and mercy and faith. They were always ready with their remarks on the slightest infraction of the ceremonial law, and yet our Lord testifies of them that they were full of the blackest impurity in their own hearts. ‘You are like to whitened sepulchres, which outwardly appear to men beautiful, but within are full of dead men’s bones, and of all filthiness. So you also outwardly indeed appear unto men just, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.’⁶

Such were the men with whom our Lord had to deal, as the appointed teachers and leaders of the people to which He was especially sent, and whose great power and influence was being more and more energetically exerted against Him as time went on. We can wonder but little that He spoke against them, although at present it was in the guarded and covered way of which this passage is an instance. For the words in which the reproof was conveyed are such as apply generally to all teachers, and indeed to others who are not teachers, but who assume, in whatever manner and with whatever right or semblance of right, the office of correcting the faults of others. And our Lord does not simply reproach those of whom He is speaking. He points out the solid reason why they cannot hope for any success in

the work of the correction of others which they undertake.

‘For there is no good tree that bringeth forth evil fruit, nor an evil tree that bringeth forth good fruit. For every tree is known by its fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor from a bramble do they gather the grape. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good, and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth that which is evil. For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.’ This is the great reason why no success can be hoped for from the efforts of those who have beams in their own eyes, to deliver their neighbours from the motes which they discern in theirs. Not only can no man teach what he does not know, or impart what he does not possess, but he cannot help reflecting himself in what he says and teaches, and if his heart is evil he must teach evil, and if his heart is good he must teach and impart good. The first part of this passage has already been explained in the commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, and the second part is repeated, soon after this time, by our Lord in a more direct address to the Scribes and Pharisees personally, on occasion of their calumnious charge against Him of being in league with Beelzebub in His casting out of the devils. ‘O generation of vipers!’—words first applied to them by St. John Baptist—‘how can you speak good things, being evil? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the good treasure bringeth forth good things, and an evil man out of an evil treasure bringeth forth evil things. But I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall render an account for it in the Day of Judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.’⁷

⁷ St. Matt. xii. 34—37.

This strong language of denunciation is reserved by our Lord for the occasion just now mentioned. In the present passage He simply lays down the truth in general words, such as will serve the purpose of warning the people against the teachers whose lives were so unsound, and at the same time of setting forth the general truth, which was to be of service throughout all time, not only for the detection of false teachers, but for the guidance of all Christians, whether teachers or not. The truth is one on which many long meditations may be made with profit. The heart itself, as has often been said, is hidden to all eyes except the eyes of God, and this is so ordained in mercy, not only to each individual soul, but to mankind as a society, for it would be impossible for us to trust one another and to live together in peace and happiness, if all hidden thoughts were revealed to all. The heart is never at rest nor inactive. It is always at work, even in sleep it works on, mechanically as it were, and for this reason even our dreams reflect in so large a measure our moral disposition and character, though, by the mercy of God, we are not responsible at such times when the dominion of reason is suspended. But the heart is always turning over images, ideas, memories, plans, schemes, day dreams as they are called, always speculating, wishing, imagining, resenting, desiring, brooding, keeping up a continual conversation with itself, the moral character of which is that of the soul in which this perpetual activity is going on. The thoughts of any single heart are as multitudinous as the grains of sand on the seashore—idle, empty, frivolous, selfish, foul, sensual, proud, vain, envious, malignant, reflecting every hue of folly and worldliness, echoing every strain or whisper of malignity and passion. Or, when by the mercy of God, grace reigns in the heart which is truly occupied with the love of Him and the contemplation of

His ways and doings, there is no garden in the world so fair in its flowers and its fruits, no mine of diamond or rubies or veins of richest ore, so full of wealth as may be the heart of man. Heaven is not too high for it, even the glories on which the Angels gaze with unveiled faces are not altogether hidden from it, it can range over all space and all time, and it can form conceptions and imaginations and aspirations and affections, which are worthy to be laid bare before the throne of its One true Love and Light. Well may the heart of man be called a store or treasure! For it is always accumulating and adding to the abundance within it, and when it has occasion to pour forth its contents there seems to be no end to its prolific fertility. St. James speaks of the tongue as a little member that boasteth proud things. ‘Behold, how small a fire what great wood it kindleth!’⁸ But if the tongue is so small in comparison to the mischief that it can give birth to, much more may the same thing be said of the heart, from which all the evil of the tongue originally proceeds.

The truth on which our Blessed Lord here insists is not so much that of the immense stores, for good or for evil, which are laid up in the heart of every man, as the other cognate truth, that the heart is always unconsciously betraying itself in all that proceeds from the mouth and indeed in all the actions of men. We may sometimes use our words, or our line of conduct, so as to veil rather than to disclose what is in our hearts, and in this sense it is of course true that there may be some exceptions to the general rule, that out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. But these cases are exceptional, and even they are not altogether exceptional, because when the mouth utters a whole tribe of lies for the purpose of deceiving others as to the real sentiments of

⁸ St. James iii. 5.

the heart, it discloses to the eye of God, Who can read the heart, all the duplicity and mendacity that is there. The mouth speaks out of the abundance of the heart, although the words which it utters misrepresent the true sentiments and intentions of the heart. But the meaning of the present passage seems to be that a man's words and teaching can only reflect what is within him, and that therefore a good man, whether he means it or not, cannot but reveal the goodness that is in him, while on the other hand, an evil man must betray the evil of his heart by his words. But the removing of the defects of others is the main subject of thought here, for these words are but a continuation of the former sentence about the motes and the beams, and give the reason why a man with a beam in his eye, so to say, cannot be trusted to remove the mote out of the eye of another, and the reason is that he has not in him the power of conveying good to the souls of others, because his own heart is full of evil. His heart is like a cistern in which there is nothing but dirty water, and therefore he cannot cleanse anything therewith. He can only make that which he attempts to cleanse, as foul as are the contents of his own heart. If this is true in ordinary matters, it is much more true in matters of the soul, because the cleansing of the soul, which is what is sought for in the removal of any defect in another person, cannot be brought about except by the working of the grace of God, and this will never be granted when the person with whose efforts it is to co-operate is so unworthy. In the passage lately quoted, of which we shall have to speak in another chapter of this volume, our Lord says to the Scribes: 'How can you speak good things, whereas you are evil?' And in the passage on which we are now commenting it is as if He said, 'How can you do good to others, whereas you are evil?'

At the same time, as has been already said more than once, the words are so general that they are an instruction to all. Perhaps they may have been meant in some measure for a special warning to the Apostles themselves, so lately called to the high office of teaching in our Lord's Name, and thus supplanting in the new Kingdom the persons to whom the words more directly applied. And it must be remembered that the Apostles, or most of them, had already heard the very similar teaching delivered in the Sermon on the Mount, and would therefore be ready to understand the words in a sense, and with the same application with that which they had borne there. The same may be said of the words which immediately follow, which are an echo of a much longer passage in that former sermon. Then He had said that there would be many who would say to Him in the last great day, calling Him Lord, Lord, that they had prophesied in His Name and cast out devils, and done many wonderful works, and that yet He would profess to them that He never knew them, and bid them depart from Him, for they were workers of iniquity. Here he says, 'Why call you Me, Lord, Lord? and do not the things which I say? Every one that cometh to Me and heareth My words and doeth them, I will show you to whom he is like. He is like a man building a house, who digged deep and laid the foundation upon a rock, and when a flood came the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and it could not shake it, for it was founded on a rock. But he that heareth and doeth not, is like a man building his house upon the earth without a foundation, against which the stream beat vehemently, and immediately it fell, and the ruin of that house was great.'

The comparison between the two passages in question —for it need hardly be said that the image of the two

foundations is taken from the former Sermon, as well as the words about calling Him Lord, Lord—shows us that our Lord must have wished to generalize the teaching in the first part of the passage here, so as to make it applicable, not only to those who have taught in His Name in the new Kingdom, but also to all who have come within the range of the teaching of that Kingdom. He was soon about to insist very much on the immense difference between the various classes of hearers of the Word of God, and on the terrible danger of those who had heard it carelessly. He seems to have changed the first part of the passage from the form in which it stood in the Sermon on the Mount, for the sake of making it thus more widely instructive. It is no longer those only who have taught in His Name that are warned, but all those who in any way call upon Him as their Lord and Master. By the use of such expressions they testified, against themselves, to their acceptance of Him as a divinely ordained Teacher. They were therefore bound by their own profession to listen to Him, and not only to hear what He said, but to practise what He taught. He already discerned the inevitable failure of His teaching in numberless cases, on account of this want of correspondence between knowledge and profession on the one hand, and practice on the other.

The words which follow signify that the time was near at hand when there would be a great trial of the hearts of those who had crowded to hear Him and to see Him work His miracles. The trial of persecution had already, indeed, begun, and it was not to pass away. It was to increase more and more in violence, until it led to His murder and to the scattering of His disciples far and wide, and though there was to be a temporary respite after His Resurrection, and many seasons of comparative peace and tranquillity to the Church afterwards, still her

history was to be in the main a repetition of His own, and she was never to be left without the wholesome discipline of the enmity of the world. His teaching was to find so much hostile to it in the degenerate hearts of men, that it would be most true that no one could be a disciple in His school without having to undergo a severe trial in his own interior, on his onward march towards the crown of his vocation. And the very same fact of the degeneracy of the human heart, was to cause the continual hatred of the world for His doctrine and His Church, and thus it was inevitable that to each man's interior struggles, pressure and persecution from without on the whole body of the Church would be added. The world is but the organized embodiment of the evil and the falsehood which are within us. The spiritual edifice of each Christian soul was therefore to be exposed to the storms of passion and temptation, often more violent than the sudden torrents of water which sweep down on a house in a country liable to storms and rains, and it must therefore be, in a true sense, a house of which the foundation is built upon a rock. What then was to be the rock on which this foundation was to be raised? It was to be a faithful, obedient, diligent practice of the precepts which He had delivered. Nothing but this could strengthen the soul against its assailants—nothing but this could secure it the assistance of Divine grace in any encounters to which it might come to be exposed.

CHAPTER X.

The Centurion's Servant.

St. Matt. vii. 5—13 ; St. Luke vii. 1—10 ; *Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 50.

WE now come to some incidents of this second year of our Lord's preaching as to the date of which we have no precise guidance. It has already been said that the Sermon on the Plain was probably delivered early in the summer, after the Pasch at which our Lord healed the impotent man at the Pool of Bethsaida in Jerusalem. Close on this Pasch followed the return of our Lord to Galilee, and the league formed against Him by the ecclesiastical rulers with the political servants of the Tetrarch. It was a coalition of very incongruous elements, but it was clearly as much to the interest of Herod to suppress any movement by which the peace of the country might be endangered, as it was to the interest of the priests at Jerusalem to oppose the influence of One Who was certainly not of themselves. We have seen that our Lord retired before the coalition, and that He made at this time the selection of the twelve to be His Apostles. The Sermon on the Plain then followed. And it is not a fanciful conjecture to place these two signal events about the time of the feast of Pentecost after the second Pasch. The next great event in the preaching of our Lord was the return to Capharnaum, after which He began to teach the people by parables only—a change in His method which attracted the wonder and caused the inquiries of the

disciples themselves. This beginning of the teaching by parables is very probably to be placed about the time of the seed-sowing for the harvest of the next year, that is, in the later months of the year to which the events already mentioned belonged. This date is made probable by the subject of the first and succeeding parables. It was so very much our Lord's habit to take the text, so to say, of His teaching from the natural objects and scenes around Him at the time, that we can hardly doubt that He chose the imagery of this first series of parables in this manner, and that the fields were actually being sown at the time at which He spoke. If this be so, and if the Sermon on the Plain be rightly placed about the feast of Pentecost, it would follow that an interval of several months occurred, immediately after the delivery of that Sermon, and before the beginning of the parables. During this interval we have little to guide us as to the exact dates of the few incidents which are recorded, though we may fairly trust the order in which they are arranged by the most historical of the Evangelists, St. Luke.

There is nothing in this that ought to be surprising to those who are, to some extent, familiar with the manner in which our Lord spent so much of His time during His Public Life. We already know that He passed large portions of the most active part of His career in Galilee, and afterwards in Judæa, in missionary circuits throughout the country, the events and occupations of which were very much the same day after day, except that He was constantly changing the scene of His labours. Periods of activity of this kind are in one sense most full of incidents of importance, for nothing can be more important in the history of the Kingdom of God than the conversion of souls, and these periods were in this respect most fruitful. But

in another sense they are marked by a great sameness, and the history which serves for one week or month would be almost equally suited to another. Thus it is not the custom of the Evangelists to speak of these circuits except in the most summary manner.

But it would often happen that the sameness of these periods would be broken by some remarkably striking incidents of mercy or power, and it is natural that such incidents should not be passed over in the sacred history. They would be exceptional features in the general picture, for which, as such, a few words would suffice. Such are the few incidents which, as is clear from the order of St. Luke, belong to this period, that is, between the Sermon on the Plain and the delivery of the first great series of the Parables of our Lord. The miracle of which we are now to speak was in some important respects singular and unprecedented in the Ministry of our Lord, and it was made by Him the occasion of a warning to some of those who were hanging back in their adhesion to Him, of which the Evangelists had afterwards many reasons for seeing the significance. We know that, even during the circuits of the first year of His Galilean preaching, our Blessed Lord was for long seasons together absent from Capharnaum, the place which, nevertheless, had gained the name of being His own city. Much more was He likely to absent Himself from it for long intervals during this the second year of His preaching. But He would often have occasion to visit it from time to time. One of these visits was made, as St. Luke tells us, at the conclusion of one of the circuits of which we are speaking, and which is hinted at rather than directly mentioned in the narrative of the Evangelists. St. Luke says, 'And when He had finished all His words in the hearing of the people, He entered into Capharnaum.' Here it was that the occasion of

the miracle was awaiting Him. ‘And the servant of a certain Centurion, who was dear to him, being sick, was ready to die, and, when he heard of Jesus, he sent to Him the ancients of the Jews, desiring Him to come and heal his servant. And when they came to Him, they besought Him earnestly, saying to Him, He is worthy that thou shouldest do this thing for him, for he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue,’ or rather, our synagogue.

The description of the Centurion and his servant, with the elders of the Jews interceding with our Lord for them, gives us a picture of what was perhaps not uncommon in the mixed society of those times. In Galilee the Gentiles were much in the minority, while in other parts, outside the precincts of the Holy Land, the Jews would themselves be a small cluster of families in the midst of a heathen population. The Providence of God had been bringing about this intermixture of Jews and Gentiles for many generations, as if to prepare the way, both for the conversion of the heathen, and for the abolition of the distinction between the two in the Christian Church. Up to the time of the Captivity, the Jews had been kept very strictly separate from all other nations, although, after the establishment of the kingdom of David and Solomon, they had had more intercourse than before with neighbouring nations. But the Captivity itself had acted, in some degree, as a leavening the Eastern nations by a Jewish influence, not the less strong morally because the Jews were weak. And under the Grecian Empire, which broke down the barrier between the Asiatic and European populations, the Jew had been scattered in large numbers over the whole civilized world. The Roman Empire contained, we may suppose, many good men in the position of this Centurion, men who had been mixed up by circum-

stances with Jews in Palestine, or with Jewish settlers in foreign parts, and who had been attracted by the superior purity of their creed or their moral law, by the beauty and reasonableness of their doctrine, and led on to serve the true God in works of charity and piety. Some of these might have become proselytes in a more formal manner, while others remained at the door, as it were, of the Tabernacle. We gather from the Acts of the Apostles that the attendance in the synagogue was not confined to Jews strictly so called. This Centurion evidently lived in intimate acquaintanceship with the chief Jews of Capharnaum. We gather also from the account of St. Luke that not all the Jewish authorities at this time were in league against our Lord. It is probable that the leaders of the opposition to Him came from Jerusalem, emissaries of the Scribes and Pharisees there. These men had known comparatively little of our Lord, of the marvellous works He wrought or the doctrines which He preached. They were simply the instruments of the blind malice and jealousy of their chiefs. On the other hand, there would be many among those who had known Him and heard Him, who could not take so strong a part against Him as these representatives of the central authority would wish. They may not have been numerous or powerful enough to turn the tide, which was now setting so violently in the direction of hostility to Him, but in their own personal feelings they may still have been on His side. Such must have been Jairus, the ruler of the synagogue at Capharnaum, such the nobleman whose son had been healed by our Lord more than a year before, and many of the wealthy publicans who had sat with Him at the feast given by St. Matthew.

It is not surprising that the Centurion and his friends should have thought that it might require a special force

of entreaty and intercession, to induce our Blessed Lord to enter the house and listen to the prayer of this good heathen. Up to this time He had done nothing to intimate directly that He regarded the Gentiles as objects of His mission, nor had He said much about the extension of the privileges of the Kingdom of God beyond the range of the chosen people. Wherever there are privileges in the way of religion and the means of grace, there it is quite certain that there will be some narrow prejudices against the indefinite opening of those privileges to every one, and a tendency to pride in their possession. The words of the Jewish elders seem to imply a sort of compassion on their part for the comparative misery of the condition of the Centurion. He might be unworthy, their words imply, of the notice of our Lord, but still he loved the holy nation and he had moreover built for them the synagogue in which God was worshipped, and the Sacred Scriptures read and the holy Law taught, in Capharnaum itself.

It was a great thing for a Roman to overcome his national pride, and lay aside his allegiance to the official religion, which had, as it was thought, done so much towards the establishment of the world-wide Empire of the great city of the Tiber. It was a great thing that he had had simplicity and humility enough to recognize the superiority of the Jewish morality, and of the worship of the One God. Deep in the hearts and conscience of the good heathen lay the germs of natural religion, of which, in truth, the revelation possessed by the Jews was the Divine superstructure, requiring that other as its own foundation. Where natural religion had not been overlaid and corrupted and obscured by the bad traditions of the false polytheism and low morality which prevailed, even among the most cultivated nations of the Pagan world, there were the instincts of which revelation was

the natural satisfaction. Thus the good heathen could not be true to his own best thoughts and the teachings of his conscience, without being prepared for Divine Revelation, and, when he came across it, it was to be seen whether he could overcome the traditional repugnance of his own proud and conquering nation. The case is exactly repeated in the case of the good Christian who has been brought up outside the Catholic Church, and who has been taught concerning her a number of those malignant falsehoods, of which the greater part of anti-Catholic controversy is made up. He is strongly drawn by the beauty and authority and unity of the Church, but can he overcome his prejudices? or will he turn away like Naaman, indignant at what he conceives to be a humiliating doctrine for his own nation? This is an issue which, in our own times and country, has to be settled, day after day, in a score of instances.

The Centurion had long ago laid aside his prejudice against the Jews and their religion. He had come to love them for the sake of their creed, which promised so much to the yearnings after truth of which he had long been conscious, and he had contributed to the worship and honour of the God of Israel in a way which is seldom left without its reward, even when the churches and sacred edifices, which are raised by a mistaken devotion, are handed over to the imperfect worship of a schismatical community. But God had given him greater gifts than the simple recognition of the truth of Judaism. We may gather from his care of his servant that he was a good and affectionate master, and we certainly learn from his own words that he was a thoughtful ponderer of the ways of God, and had arrived at a very high notion of the dignity of our Lord's Person. It is hard to think that he did not understand even the Divine character of our Lord. His case is the exact

counterpart of that of the man who was probably his friend, the nobleman who had met our Lord at Cana the year before, and begged Him to come down and heal his son at Capharnaum. The heart of the Centurion had treasured that incident, and now he was to show the fruit which it had produced in his own thoughts concerning our Lord. Unreflecting men are always inclined to limit the goodness, and even the power, of God to that of which they have found evidence or declaration, forgetting that whatever God does, or declares concerning Himself, is but a partial manifestation of His character and attributes, and that all such manifestations are meant to hint at a great deal more than they actually reveal. This dulness lies at the foundation of the extreme reluctance which men show as to admitting anything like a miracle beyond what is written in Scripture, if even that—as if the power which enacted the laws of nature could not go beyond them, as if the very fact that God does so many wonderful things ordinarily was a proof that He could do nothing extraordinarily. Just as without the constant witness of the written Law men forgot even some of the plainest conclusions involved in the first principles of the natural Law—as was especially the case with regard to all that concerned purity—so many things which seem to Catholics as evidently true, though not actually written in Scripture, as with regard to the position, for example, of our Blessed Lady and the Saints in the Kingdom of Heaven, are challenged by Protestants as contrary to the very spirit of revelation. It is to such cases that St. Ignatius applies our Lord's words to His Apostles: ‘Do not you yet know nor understand?’ implying that God means us to reason reverently on the principles and truths and facts of faith and revelation and experience, and that He does not make every natural conclusion

therefrom a matter of special revelation. The Centurion had simply reasoned from what was certain concerning our Lord's power and mercy, and yet he had reached a point in the faith which so many others had not attained.

St. Luke, as was natural with the Evangelist who wrote especially for the Gentile Churches converted by the preaching of St. Paul, seems to have drawn his account of the incidents of this miracle, either from the good Centurion himself, or from some of his friends. His account is that of one who stands, as it were, by the side of the Centurion in the whole scene. St. Matthew, on the other hand, seems to stand by our Lord. St. Luke tells us first how the master of the servant who was at the point of death and in great suffering, set a very high value on his services. 'He was precious to him.' Then he tells us how he begged his friends among the Jewish elders to go to our Lord, Whose arrival in Capharnaum had just taken place, and ask Him to come and heal the servant for whom he is so anxious. 'Jesus,' as St. Matthew says, 'said, I will come and heal him.' St. Luke only tells us that our Lord went with the elders of the Jews. It would seem that either His near approach was notified to the Centurion, or that he conjectured that He was approaching, for the thought of this extreme condescension filled him with a holy fear. When our Lord had put off the nobleman who had come about his son, the latter had urged Him to come before his son died. He had no hesitation as to putting Him to so much trouble. The Centurion, on the other hand, when he heard that our Lord was actually on the way, bethought himself at once of his own unworthiness. But it was not simply the thought of his own unworthiness that filled him and dictated his message to our Lord—it was the conviction in which the nobleman had at first been lacking, that

it was quite as easy for our Lord to cure the poor patient at a distance, as by coming Himself to his bedside. Thus our Lord drew out from the nobleman, by His seeming reluctance to grant his prayer, the more perfect faith which the Centurion already possessed, and from him our Lord drew by granting his petition in the very terms in which it had been made, the profession of this higher faith which He had not met with in Israel. If our Lord had not at first checked the nobleman, he would not have risen to the faith that He could heal at a distance. If our Lord had not intimated His assent to the request of the Centurion, He would not have given him the occasion of the profession of this higher faith.

'Who was he,' the Centurion said to himself, 'that this great Prophet should come to his house—should tread the floor of a Pagan dwelling, and enter a household the greater part of the inmates of which were perhaps still Pagans? Why should he trouble Him so far?' Had He not commanded the fever to leave the mother of St. Peter's wife, as well as healed the son of his friend at a distance of many miles? He had himself been afraid to go to our Lord on account of his nationality and his other grounds for humility, and could he let Him Himself come to carry out his prayer? He had still by his side other friends, known perhaps to our Lord, besides those who had charged themselves with the first embassy; and these he begged at once to go and meet our Lord and stop Him on the way. 'Lord, trouble not Thyself, for I am not worthy that Thou shouldst enter under my roof. For which cause neither did I think myself worthy to come unto Thee. But say the word, and my servant shall be healed.' He knew perfectly well that it was not necessary that our Lord should come. His conceptions concerning Him were that He was the absolute master of disease and health, life and

death. He himself knew what it was to command, to obey and to be obeyed, and his ideas concerning our Lord were that it was as natural and inevitable for disease to obey Him, as for himself to obey his own superior officer, or for his own soldiers or servants to obey him. He speaks of himself as a man under authority, for he was both under others and the superior of others, and it was more modest of him to speak of the position of subordination which he filled than of that of superiority. But when he went on to illustrate and give examples of his meaning, he naturally drew them from his own practice. For our Lord, in the healing of diseases, acted the part of a master and superior. ‘For I also am a man subject to authority, having under me soldiers, and I say to one, Go, and he goeth, and to another, Come, and he cometh, and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it.’ It is nothing for the Lord of all to do with diseases and health as poor mortals do in the small sphere of their petty authority. A word from Thee can send the malady away, as my word sends one of my soldiers on an errand. A word from Thee can make health approach and take possession of this wasted form, as easily as a word from me can call a soldier to my side. The powers of health and sickness, life and death, wait upon Thee, as my servant waits upon me and executes in a moment my behests. ‘Speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed.’

Such was the message, which in the second stage, so to speak, of this beautiful incident, our Lord received from this poor heathen. It is not, ‘Come down at once before my child die,’ but ‘Trouble not Thyself to come,’ for my servant’s health can be secured by Thy simple word. There is nothing here about the power of prayer, as even Martha said to our Lord about Lazarus, that if

He had been there, her brother would not have died, and that even then she knew that whatsoever He would ask of God, God would give it Him. Our Lord is not asked to pray, but to act on His own power. And this was, as far as we know, before He had manifested His great power over life and death by the raising of the widow's son. The faith of the Centurion was perfectly reasonable, and had the most solid foundation. It was but the inevitable conclusion, as has been said, from what he had heard, and perhaps seen, concerning our Lord. It was the same kind of faith with that which our Lord required in His disciples, when He upbraided them for not understanding that they could not be in danger in the storm on the lake as long as He was with them, or which He required of St. Peter when He bade him come unto Him on the waters. That is, the grounds on which it rested were perfectly beyond all question. What the Centurion was commended for was that he drew lawful and natural conclusions from that which was as obvious to others as well as to himself, though the generality of men are so dull and hesitating in matters of faith, that it is seldom that these conclusions are drawn with the swiftness and certainty which belong to them. His argument was simply this, that any authority worthy of the name was as easily exercised, and as perfectly obeyed, by a mere signification of the will of the superior in power or rank, as by his own presence or by any exertion on his part beyond such signification. It was already proved by a hundred experiences that our Lord was the Master of health, and that He could dismiss disease at His will. How could it matter in what way that will was exercised or signified? He would not indeed be the absolute Master that He was, if His personal presence was requisite for the carrying out of His commands.

It shows the infinite compassion of our Lord for the dulness of faith in the ordinary run of mankind, that He saw something so special in this faith of the Centurion. He was still on His way to the house when these second messengers met Him with the words of the Centurion, and He paused, and marvelled, and turning about to the multitude that followed Him, He said, 'Amen I say to you, I have not found so great faith, not even in Israel.' Simple as this faith was, it surpassed any that He had met with in the whole multitudes of people who had been the objects of His miraculous bounties, or who came to Him, as the Centurion, for the cure and welfare of others dear to them. It had cost Him some trouble to elicit from the nobleman, already mentioned, the act of faith which He required for the performance of that earlier miracle at a distance and by a simple word. Nor in others of the chosen people had He found any faith like this. For the Centurion not only accepted the cure without seeing it, but he went so far as to suggest to our Lord that He was taking unnecessary trouble in coming to his house. It seems that the second set of messengers immediately left our Lord and went back to the house of the Centurion.

But the incident did not end here. Just as the Centurion, after having sent in the first instance to beg that our Lord would come to heal his servant, afterwards, and in the course of a few moments, rose to the higher level of faith, and sent off to stop Him on the road, so now after having sent this second embassy, he rose still higher, and seems to have reflected that it would be more reverent and courteous to go himself and meet our Lord, before He could cross his threshold. So on the heels of these second messengers he came himself, and almost before our Lord had had the time to make His remark about the faith which He had not found in Israel, the

Centurion was himself at His feet with the same words which he had sent by his messengers. ‘Lord I am not worthy that Thou shouldst enter under my roof, but only say the word and my servant shall be healed. For I also am a man under authority, having under me soldiers; and I say to this, Go, and he goeth, and to another, Come, and he cometh, and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it.’ There again then our Lord repeated His gracious words of commendation, as if not to be outdone, in the tender courtesy of His Sacred Heart, by the reverent humility of the Centurion. ‘Amen, I say to you, I have not found so great faith in Israel.’ For it was characteristic of our Lord’s exquisitely tender courtesy and consideration, that He should praise the Centurion to His face, after having already praised him to the people when his messengers had delivered his message. And then He added other words, very expressive indeed of the thoughts which must have been frequently in His Heart at this stage of His teaching, when He was beginning to turn away in disappointment and sorrow from those to whom He had been in the first instance sent, and who had received so many wonderful marks of His mercy and love. This Centurion at His feet was not only a tacit rebuke to the duller faith of the chosen people, but he was a type and foretaste of the thousands and thousands who were to come to Him from among the Gentiles, and to receive the favours of the spiritual Kingdom from which the heirs of that Kingdom were to be excluded by their own fault. Now for the first time did words significant of the rejection of the chosen people cross the lips of our Blessed Lord. The Apostles must have treasured them up with thoughtfulness and even anxiety, and, at the stage of their training at which they had now arrived, this new truth was all important for them. ‘And I say unto you, that many shall come from the East and the

West, and shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom of Heaven.'

It might have been thought that our Lord would stop here. The words which He had just uttered were a reference to a great passage in the prophet Isaias, in which the calling of the Gentiles to the privileges of the Kingdom of God was clearly foretold. But in that passage the prophet is commissioned to declare to the chosen nation the good purpose of God, in exalting it by the gathering in of other nations to the Kingdom, rather than its own future humiliation, the chastisement which its own incredulity would force Him to inflict, in its own temporary exclusion. 'Fear not, for I am with thee, I will bring thy seed from the East and gather thee from the West. I will say to the North, give up, and to the South keep not thou back, bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth. And every one that calleth on My Name, I have created him for My glory, I have formed him and made him, bringing forth the people that are blind and have eyes, that are deaf and have ears. All the nations are assembled together, and the tribes are gathered. Who among you can declare this and shall make us hear the former things?'¹ Even if this prophecy is to be applied, in the first instance, to the return of the Jews from their captivity, its language seems to have suggested the words of our Lord about the other quarters of the world. But there is nothing in it concerning the rejection of the chosen nation. This was not in the first purpose, so to speak, of God, but it was the consequence of their own perversity.

But now that our Lord was about to be Himself rejected by the nation on which His favours had been lavished so freely, the circumstance of the heathen

¹ Isaias xlivi. 5—9.

Centurion at His feet was a picture to the Sacred Heart, not only of the admission of the Gentiles to the Gospel Kingdom, but of the working of that law of which we have so many instances in the history of God's dealings with His creatures, the law of substitution of some in the place of others, who have forfeited their privileges. This law has prevailed from the beginning, and it has not only been followed in the Providence of God, but it has also been continually dwelt upon by His chosen servants in their contemplation of those dealings. It was followed by the rejection of the rebel angels, and in the substitution of mankind in their place, and this is the subject on which our Blessed Lady seems to dwell devoutly in her Canticle the *Magnificat*. 'He hath showed might in His arm, He hath scattered the proud in the conceit of their hearts ; He hath put down the mighty from their seat, and hath exalted the humble ; He hath filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he hath sent empty away.' There is the same substitution of Jacob for Esau, as the heir of the promise, of David for Saul, as the King of the chosen people. And these substitutions involved immense issues, as by means of them the Jews came to their great place in the counsels of God, and our Lord, when incarnate, became the Son of David. The New Testament is full of the substitution of the Gentiles for the Jews. Our Lord brings in this principle more than once into His great parables, the teaching of which is that those who are first called are in many respects heedless or unworthy, and that then the privileges which they forfeit are almost forced upon others in their stead. St. John Baptist hit this weak point in his own people, when he warned them not to say that they had Abraham for their father, because God was able of the very stones to raise up children to Abraham.

If we consider the various instances which the

history of creatures presents to us of this forfeiture of high privileges, we find that the root of the evil is usually either pride, or one of the faults which issue from pride. It was pride in the rebel angels that made them rebel. It was the profane contempt of his privileges which made Esau sell his birthright, and this contempt came from pride. Saul disobeyed, and his disobedience sprang from the same root. On the other hand the character of Jacob and of David is the character of humility, and we see in this Centurion, and in the other Gentile on whom our Lord showed special mercy, the Syrophenician woman, who, as it were, wrung from Him the healing of her daughter, though, as He said, He was not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, by an unusual grace of faith founded on humility. This then is the true secret for the right use and preservation of any external graces, or birth in the Catholic Church, of high vocation, or of any special favour, such as God bestows on those who live within the reach of great opportunities, or to whom His Providence addresses any particular calls to spiritual advancement. It is humility that has the power to read and understand the advances which God makes to us in His particular dealings with our souls, it is humility that brings the unconscious and unwitting heretic or schismatic to the door of the Church, while men of learning, or ecclesiastical position, the leaders of parties or movements outside the Church, are wooed in vain by the same grace of conversion with which simpler souls close at once. The history of these 'children of the Kingdom,' of whom our Lord more directly spoke on this occasion, is constantly repeated in the rejection of noble vocations, in the deaf ear which is turned by so many to the breathings of the Holy Ghost, inviting them to the practice of the Evangelical Counsels, in the men who can lead others to the perception of Catholic doc-

trines, and up to the very threshold of the Church, and yet themselves refuse to submit to the humiliation involved in submission to her rule. They are, or they might be, the children of the Kingdom, but they are not humble, and so the grace passes away from them or passes them by. They are cast out into the exterior darkness. Outside the Church and the Kingdom of God there is eternal gloom, ignorance, delusion, sorrow, misery, within all is light and joy. But it is not only gloom and darkness that are the lot of the rejected children—there is also ‘weeping and gnashing of teeth,’ both in the darkness outside the Church in this world, and much more in the darkness which will be the home of the enemies of God for all eternity. The remorse which they felt for the graces they have forfeited is one great source of their weeping, and beside the remorse of their own conscience, there is the pain justly inflicted in the decrees of God for so much unfaithfulness, and the countless sins into which that unfaithfulness has led them.

Thus for the first time almost did our Lord open to His hearers the future condemnation which was to fall on those who had inherited so many privileges and had not acted up to them. His heart passed far beyond the immediate occasion of His words. It was no longer the faith that could draw from His mercy the most beautiful miracles, but the faith that was to be rewarded by the possession of the Eternal Kingdom of Heaven that His mind dwelt on. It was no longer a single suppliant for a temporal grace who knelt before Him, for in Him our Lord saw the multitudes of the Gentile Church taking possession of the inheritance which, in the first instance, had been promised to the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob according to the flesh. And with the picture of happy simple credulity, as the world would deem it, there came also the other of captious

resistance to grace in the heirs of the Kingdom. The refusal to accept the boon promised them, on the terms on which alone it could be gained, and the terrible punishment of their pride and disbelief which was figured in the words about the exterior darkness, words which they themselves might have been inclined to use of the Gentile world outside themselves and the commonwealth of Israel, but which were to have their most sad fulfilment, both in this world and the next, in the miseries of their own rejection.

It has been said that St. Luke's account of this incident in the preaching of our Lord, is that of a person who has heard it from the Centurion or his friends, while the account of St. Matthew is that of one who was in our Lord's company from the beginning. This remark is sufficient to explain the different manner in which the story ended in the one case and in the other. St. Luke accompanies, as it were, the friends of the Centurion in their way back to the house from which they had been sent with the touching message of humility, 'Lord, I am not worthy,' and the rest. On receiving that message, our Lord turned to the multitudes which were following Him, and made His remark about the great faith which had not been found even in Israel, the people which inherited all the promises and prophecies, as well as the privileges which had come down to them from their fathers—the possession of the true faith, the Law, the Temple, and its sacrifices, and the like. These friends of the Centurion must have gone back to the house while he himself was making his way to our Lord, and if they did not meet him, the fact is easily to be accounted for by supposing the distance to have been very short, and the spot at which our Lord was to be readily reached by more than one path or street. When they returned to the house, St. Luke tells us, they found

the servant whole who had been sick. The cure, therefore, had taken place while they were on their way. St. Matthew, speaking of what passed between our Lord and the master of the servant, tells us that Jesus said to the Centurion, ‘Go, and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee.’ He could not grant the request in any more gracious way, or in any more tender words, than by making the Centurion’s own faith the measure, and as it were the cause, of the granting of the boon which he had asked, and then, at the moment when the words were spoken, the cure took place, ‘And the servant was healed at the same hour.’ To the nobleman our Lord had said, ‘Go thy way, thy son liveth,’ for the faith of that poor father had not yet risen to the required height. Faith came to him with our Lord’s injunction to depart. The faith of the Centurion had attained its full measure when he sent his message to our Lord, and so our Lord tells him it shall be ‘as thou hast believed.’

The accounts end here abruptly, and nothing is said of the Centurion hastening home, or of the other servants coming in joy to greet him with the news. It may be thought that if our Lord had visited the house, on His way to which the master had sent Him, we should have been told of it. But all these matters are left for the Christian imagination to supply, the sacred writers contenting themselves, in this as in all other such instances, with the simple statement of the facts which were essential for their narrative. Tradition tells of the conversion of the Centurion to the faith in consequence of this miracle, and he is said, after the Resurrection of our Lord, to have become a Christian preacher. But as far as the narrative of the Evangelist is concerned, we part from him here, and the services he may have rendered to the cause of our Lord will be revealed only in the Kingdom of Heaven. Or rather, perhaps it may

be said, we do not part from him here. His words are ever in the ears of the devout worshippers in Christian churches, for they are taken up by the Church in her Holy Mass, and are perpetually repeated, both by priests and people, or at least in the name of the people, as by priests in their own name, before the reception of the highest privilege bestowed permanently on mankind, the reception of the blessed Body and Blood of our Lord in Holy Communion. Thousands and thousands of times every day, all over the world, are the words repeated, 'Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldest enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.' And those who repeat these words do not utter them in the thought or expectation or desire that our Lord will turn away from them, as if taking them at their word, but simply because the words live on in the Church as the best expression of that humility which is so pleasing to God that to it He can deny nothing. Whether our Lord entered under the roof of the Centurion, we are nowhere told, but we know that it would be ill for us if He did not enter really and truly under the roof of our mouths and into our hearts and bodies in His Sacramental Presence, there to confer on us benefits and blessings far greater than even the healing of bodily diseases.

It is not, as we know, often that the Holy Catholic Church adopts words in this manner, and the words which she most continually uses in her addresses to God, and our Lord, or our Blessed Lady, are the words of angels, or of great saints, or the words taught us by our Lord Himself. But this poor heathen Centurion has been made, in a certain sense, the teacher of Christian devotion to all times and generations, and we learn from him that there is no more certain way of gaining a boon from our Lord than the heartfelt profession of our utter

unworthiness to receive it, and of His absolute power to give us the substance of what we are in need of in any way that pleases Him. So St. Peter confessed, after the first miraculous fishing, ‘Depart from me for I am a sinful man, O Lord,’ not wishing, certainly, that our Lord should leave him, but pouring out to Him the genuine and most prevailing confession of his own unfitness for the harbouring of so great a guest. Such was the confession which our Lord puts into the mouth of the returning prodigal, ‘Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before thee, I am no more worthy to be called thy son.’ So too the poor leper was content with the prayer, ‘Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me whole.’ It was this confession of the Omnipotence of God which the Centurion added to that of his own unworthiness, and by so doing, won from our Lord the answer that it should be done to him according to his faith. And the poor Syrophœnician woman seems to go even one step farther, for she was able to discern the mercifulness as well as the power of our Lord, even through the veil of a first refusal, supported by the statement that He was not sent to such as her, ‘Suffer first the children to be filled, for it is not good to take the bread of the children and cast it to the dogs,’ ‘Yea, Lord, for the whelps also, eat under the table of the crumbs of the children.’² This was a confession, not only of His power and of her unworthiness, but also of the compassionate mercy of His Heart, which was sure to go beyond the special purpose of His formal mission. The words thus involve a principle in the ways of God, the manifest workings of which it would task the sublimest theologians to unfold. In all these petitions we see the greatness of faith coupled with humility, which delights the Heart of our Lord and is, so to say, irresistible with Him.

² St. Mark vii. 27.

CHAPTER XI.

Our Lord's Brethren.

St. Mark iii. 20, 21 ; *Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 51.

IT seems well to place at this point of the narrative an incident which is mentioned by St. Mark alone, although something not unlike it is recorded by St. Matthew a little later. It is one of those minor incidents, as they seem, mentioned by the Evangelists sometimes, for the sake of some few words of our Lord connected with them, or, as seems the case here, for the sake of illustrating the general picture which they are drawing, for the exact place of which in the harmony of the Gospels we are left more or less to conjecture, but it is usually best to place them where they occur in the history without changing the order of the narrative. St. Mark gives us, more than once, little touches, as they may be called, which add considerably to our perception of the state of things in which our Lord was now moving, and as he places this incident immediately after the selection of the twelve Apostles, leaving out, as was to be expected, the Sermon on the Plain, there seems good reason for thinking that it occurred at this short visit of our Lord to Capharnaum, for such it seems to have been, which is chiefly memorable for the miracle of the healing of the Centurion's servant, and the notable words which the faith of the master drew from our Lord.

We need not repeat what has already been said about the family and near relatives of our Blessed Lord. We hear but little of them in the sacred narrative, but this must not make us think that they were not continually in His thoughts, and in intercourse with Him. We are not informed, indeed, as to the number of those who are thus spoken of. They were probably the blood relations of His Mother, as the relatives of St. Joseph would most probably be found in Bethlehem rather than in Galilee, which seems to have been the home of our Blessed Lady, and of her parents. All through the Gospels the terms brethren and sisters are used in the Jewish sense, which includes near relations, first or second cousins, and the like, and we do not know certainly whether the 'sisters' of our Blessed Lady who are mentioned in the history, were her sisters or her cousins. Tradition is not unanimous on the point, whether she was the one single child of her parents, or one of a family. There seem at all events to have been two or three families of cousins of our Lord, who are classed under the general head of His brethren. Some of these were now found among His Apostles. But there were also others, whose names perhaps have not come down to us, for the Evangelists are very sparing in details of this kind. We hear of them just at the very beginning of the Public Life of our Lord, when St. John tells us of His removal from Nazareth to Capharnaum, with His Mother, His brethren, and His disciples. This was just before the first Pasch in His Public Life, and it seems to be mentioned by St. John with that supplementary purpose which had so much influence on the formation of his Gospel, in order that we might understand how it was that Capharnaum came to be the city of our Lord's home, as far as He had a home. It would seem, however, that some of His rela-

tives remained at Nazareth, for at a later time than this at which we have now arrived, that is, at the time when He paid His last recorded visit to that town, and was received with great coldness, the people of Nazareth are mentioned as saying that they had his ‘sisters’ all with them, that is that His female cousins were settled there. The same is not said of His ‘brethren.’ Thus it seems likely that the sisters of these two or three families were married in Nazareth, while their brothers, or some of them, accompanied our Blessed Lady when she fixed herself at the chief scene of our Lord’s labours.

There was thus, as it appears, a little cluster of near relatives of our Lord at Capharnaum, with whom was probably the usual home of His Blessed Mother, especially at the times when He was absent on His missionary tours throughout the country. Of these near relatives of His own, not all were at this time believers in His Divine Mission or in His Personal Divinity. It does not follow from this that they all were hostile or unfriendly. There is every reason for thinking that they were full of the deepest natural affection for Him, but did not as yet understand Him. It is probable that our Lord allowed Himself to experience that which is so constantly meeting us in the lives of His servants, especially those who are called by Him to His service from the midst of communities outside the Catholic Church, who are tried by the disappointment of finding their prayers for the conversion of their dearest on earth long baffled, by some slowness or blindness in perceiving the truth on the part of those for whom humanly speaking they pray most eagerly. In such cases there is often the very tenderest affection, though the circumstances necessarily involve, more or less, a lack of mutual comprehension which would not be painful at all in persons less closely and less fondly knit together by natural ties. This

is a part of our Lord's Life on earth of which we have only the slightest glimpses, but we cannot doubt that, as He was perfect in all His relations and in the discharge of all duties, public or private, as He was the tenderest and most loving of sons, or of friends, or of masters, so also He was the most affectionate and dutiful of cousins, or brothers in the wider sense of the term. But there would have been much indeed lost to us of the example of our Lord, if He had not, when He was twelve years old, left our Blessed Lady and St. Joseph so abruptly, in order to linger in the temple about His Father's business. And so it would not have been so useful to us if our Lord had not shared the difficulties which are so painful to His servants, in having to deal with incredulous relatives and blood connections who held Him, for a time at least, more cheaply than He deserved, or were at least blind to the great truths which He came to assert concerning His own Person. If the veil were lifted which conceals so much from us of our Lord's experience of this kind, we should certainly see a picture, of the utmost beauty and instructiveness, in His dealings with those who were so dear to Him, who knew Him so well according to the flesh, but who were so dull in understanding the full truth concerning Him. We may suppose also that our Blessed Lady's life among them must have been full of occasions for the exercise of wonderful prudence, patience, and charity, and that here also there is hidden a chapter of history well fitted to delight the eyes of Heaven.

It is not at all unlikely that these relatives of our Lord shared to some extent in the favour or disfavour which waited on His own Person, as the popular feeling changed concerning Him. They would certainly be known as the 'brethren' of the famous preacher and worker of miracles, during the first year of His Galilean

preaching, when there was but little of opposition to Him and much of popular applause and favour. Their position among their fellow townsfolk would be far more honourable, than when the time came for the ecclesiastical authorities to make their league with the Herodians against Him. At the same time it is natural to think that His own nearest relations would be of all others the most anxious for His personal safety, and on the look out against the many dangers which now threatened Him. As long as He was absent from the city, they would hear little of Him, or of the plots against Him, but they might be well aware of the designs of His enemies, and, in consequence very anxious that He should not expose Himself too much to the risk of the execution of those designs. Even their own safety might to some extent depend upon their not being too closely identified with Him. Thus they would have every motive for being on the watch, and for keeping Him, if possible, out of the dangers which they saw gathering around Him.

It is probably to some such motives as these that we are to ascribe the conduct of the near relatives of our Lord on the occasion of which St. Mark speaks. Our Lord had been absent for some time from the city which was the head quarters of the coalition against Him, and now He had suddenly appeared and made a great sensation by the miracle on the servant of the Centurion, a personage, probably of some considerable note in a community like that of Capharnaum. The news would fly through the town, and soon reach the ears, not only of His affectionate kinsfolk, but also of the many enemies in official position who were on the look out for Him. It is very natural that His friends should take the alarm, and endeavour to persuade Him to retire, or even to force Him into a place of safety. So bold a

challenge to His powerful foes might well seem to them an act little short of madness, and if they had not the faith in His Divinity which would make the heart of our Blessed Lady or the Apostles comparatively secure about such dangers, it would be all the more natural in them to do their utmost to shield Him from the consequences of His apparent rashness. It is in this way, then, that we are probably to explain the short incident of which we are speaking.

St. Mark, as has been said, proceeds directly from the mention of the selection of the twelve Apostles to this passage in the Life of our Lord. It is quite in keeping with the character of his Gospel that he should omit the Sermon on the Plain, as he has omitted also the Sermon on the Mount, for his Gospel is notably the story of the actions of our Lord, rather than the record of His discourses and teachings. But it may seem less consistent with his method to have omitted the remarkable miracle on the servant of the Centurion. We cannot always furnish reasons for these omissions or insertions in the Evangelists, but it may be supposed, in the present case, that St. Mark, writing for the Roman Church, did not wish to mention an incident which turned in great measure on the inferiority of the Gentiles to the Jews in the eyes of our Lord's contemporaries in Judea itself. Our best authority for the state of the Roman Christians is the Epistle of St. Paul to that Church, and the whole composition and design of that Epistle reveal to us the fact that the community to which it was addressed was of a composite character, made up of a large section of the Jewish residents in Rome on the one hand, and of a large number of Gentile converts on the other. To such a community a prudent Evangelist might not choose to mention an incident in which the Jew and the Gentile were brought into sharp contrast, though he might very

well record for their benefit the other beautiful incident of Gentile faith in the case of the Syrophenician mother, which is inserted in his Gospel by St. Mark as well as by St. Matthew.¹ But though St. Mark omits the miracle, he is the only Evangelist to insert this little incident which seems to have been the consequence of the miracle. ‘They came,’ he says, ‘to a house,’ that is, probably, to the house in which our Lord usually dwelt when He was at Capharnaum. ‘And the multitude came together again, so that they could not so much as eat bread. And when His friends had heard of it, they went out to lay hold of Him, for they said, He is become mad.’ It seems clear that our Lord’s appearance at Capharnaum was almost always the occasion for a collection of the multitudes, and especially if He had, quite lately, added some fresh miracle of importance to the many of which they had been witnesses. But the greater was the concourse and the excitement among the people, the greater would the danger be that the opportunity would be taken by His enemies for the accomplishment of their plans against Him. He had consulted, so it seemed, the dictates of prudence in remaining so long out of the sight of these enemies. Now He was in their very midst, and apparently braving them in their very stronghold. To the eye of human affection and prudence He might well seem to have lost His senses.

It would seem as if the purpose of the Evangelist were sufficiently answered by the simple statement of the facts just related. He tells us nothing of the answer of our Lord, if He made any answer to the remonstrances of His kinsfolk, nor does he say what measures they took, nor how He baffled them. St. Mark seems to wish us to

¹ St. Matthew xv. 21—28. St. Mark vii. 24—30. There is a marked softening of the words concerning the Gentiles in St. Mark’s account.

consider chiefly the fact that this judgment was formed on our Lord by those who ought to have known Him best. It is extremely interesting, and not a little consoling, to find our Lord Himself in the case in which many of His servants have often been placed. Human prudence cannot understand the principles of supernatural action, and tender natural affection is apt to issue in many a measure of opposition to the impulses of heavenly wisdom and charity. These kinsfolk of our Lord were not to be blamed for their excessive anxiety for His safety. It came from the two causes of their intense affection for His Person, and of their very imperfect perception of His Mission. In such cases the ventures of the Apostolic life, the devotion of self to the cause of God in religion, the risks of missionary enterprise, the danger of bold preaching of the truth in the face of a hostile world, the going forth as sheep among wolves, are perils which human love cannot bear to see braved by those to whom it most fondly clings. But like our Lord, those who are called to follow Him in this kind of life, and in enterprises for the glory of His Father, have to act on higher principles, and it is often the case that the truest wisdom is just the boldest and most apparently reckless course. An instance of this kind occurs in the life of St. Francis of Sales, who had, for some purpose of charity, to pass through Geneva, then the stronghold of his bitterest enemies, where his life would have been in danger, and who quietly gave his name at the gate as the 'Bishop of the Diocese,' and went through unmolested.

It is only what we should think natural in such a case, that these 'Brethren' of our Lord, as they are called, were in due time to be among His devoted disciples; and we shall be able to trace their gradual advances in faith. It was the Providence of God

that they should learn the truth concerning Him, as our Lord said to St. Peter, not from flesh and blood, but from the teaching of His Heavenly Father. For a time they were to be simply most loving watchers of His career, on whom the light had not yet dawned. Many great purposes of God's wisdom were thus served, for the immense danger of the influence of natural affections on those who were to be in high places in the Church, had to be guarded against by something in His own Life, and there might have been more such ambitions as that of the Mother of St. James and St. John for Him to fight against, if all His near kinsfolk had been at once as quick in recognizing His Divine dignity as they were careful of His Person. It is said that the 'Joseph called Barsabas and surnamed the Just,' who was put into competition, so to say, with St. Mathias, when an Apostle was to be chosen in the place of Judas, was one of these 'Brethren' of our Lord, and it has been thought that the choice of St. Mathias was made on the ground that he was not one of the blood relations of our Lord. However this may have been, it is certain that few things have done more mischief in the Church than the influence of family connections and interests. And though there have been brilliant exceptions of virtue and high sanctity, among the immense number of men who have been promoted because they have borne honoured names or have had powerful connections, they have been exceptions indeed, more than counterbalanced by a far greater number of deplorable examples from which the greatest miseries have resulted.

CHAPTER XII.

The Raising of the Widow's Son.

St. Luke vii. 11—16; *Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 51.

IT appears that this visit of our Lord to Capharnaum, during which He healed the servant of the faithful Centurion, was a break in the course of the evangelical circuit of preaching, which He began after the conclusion of the Sermon on the Plain. He did not stay long in the city which had come to be called His own. Indeed, as we have seen, He was not safe there, and those who loved Him best in simple human affection, could not wish Him to expose Himself to the malice of the powerful conspirators against His life. It seems, also, as if our Lord's preaching at this time was marked by even unusual earnestness and perseverance, as it was to be almost His last time of labouring regularly in Galilee. The moment He was known to be at Capharnaum, crowds would naturally flock to Him, all the more if the miracle on the Centurion's servant got to be widely known. The laboriousness of His own teaching communicated itself to His disciples, who by this time had much to do on such occasions in the way of instructing converts and preparing them for direct intercourse with our Lord or the reception of Baptism. It might naturally seem to His near relations, of whom we have been speaking in the last chapter, that a visit such as this to Capharnaum might be a moment of repose to Him and His hardly worked companions. They could not enter

into the knowledge in which He habitually lived of the value of souls, of the danger of missing opportunities, and of the special reasons which there might be for doing all that could be done in Capharnaum while there was yet time.

The great miracle lately wrought would have stirred up afresh the enthusiasm of the people, and brought back for the moment the happy readiness to believe and listen to Him, which had characterized the inhabitants of the city when He first began to make it His home. So our Lord worked on, we are not told for how long, notwithstanding the exertions of His friends to induce Him to relent and rest and look after His own safety. His time was not yet come, nor was it to be in Galilee that His enemies were to carry out to the end their designs against His life. The occasion passed away, and in a few days He was probably again on His evangelical tour, passing from town to town, and village to village. In the course of this circuit the next great recorded miracle occurred. It is evidently related by St. Luke in the place which it occupies in his Gospel, for the distinct purpose of explaining the incident which follows next after it, that is, the embassy of the disciples of St. John Baptist to ask our Lord whether He were in truth the Messias. It is not too much to conclude that it was also worked by our Lord for the purpose of arousing the attention of the people, for the first time, by a miracle in which He displayed His power over life and death, and of so kindling an enthusiasm which might make itself felt even in the remote prison of His beloved friend the Baptist, thus to give him the opportunity of bearing, in truth, his last witness to our Lord before his head fell at the behest of a lascivious dancing-girl.

The miracle of which we are now about to speak belongs to that class, among the similar works of our

Lord, in which He seems to have acted with a distinct purpose of manifesting His glory and power, without any positive solicitation, on the part either of the subjects of the miracles or of any one in their name. In this respect it stands in striking contrast to the miracle just now related, the healing of the Centurion's servant. In that case a very considerable amount of influence, if we may so speak, had been exerted in order to induce Him, as men thought, to work the miracle. In the present case, there is nothing of the kind. It seems as if He was on the look out for an opportunity to work a wonder of mercy, still more surprising than any which have been as yet recorded in the course of the Gospel history. We cannot of course be certain that, up to this time, our Blessed Lord had not raised any one from the dead. But no such miracle has been mentioned, up to this time, by the Evangelists. If it were the case, as is most probable, that this was indeed the earliest instance of a raising from the dead, it may also be supposed that, as to this class of miracle, people would hardly have thought of asking for such favours, on account of the dulness of their faith as yet unremoved. There would probably not be many cases in which they would reason with the simplicity of which we have seen an instance in the Centurion, and there is certainly a natural and just tendency in our minds to consider the power of restoring the dead to life one of the very highest, if not the very highest, of all the manifestations of power altogether Divine and reserved to God.

The few instances found among the Prophets would serve rather to enhance the singular pre-eminence of such wonders than the reverse. But our Lord was to manifest this power also, as well as those of which we have already had instances, and we cannot think but that the time and occasion of this manifestation were

carefully arranged, in the Providence of His Father, with reference to the evidence which was gradually accumulating concerning His Divine Person and Mission. Thus He had spoken to the Jewish rulers at Jerusalem, in the long discourse in which, after the miracle at the Probatic Pool, He had set forth for them the various kinds of evidence by which His Mission was attested, of this sort of miracle as something future. And, though He may have had more directly in His mind the future resurrection of all men by the power of the Son of Man, it is likely that He also intended to prepare them for resurrections to be worked in His Public Life, the last and most wonderful of which was the raising of Lazarus close to Jerusalem itself, a miracle so splendid, so unquestionable in all its details, as to drive His enemies to an absolute despair, and to the plot against His life which was consummated in the Passion a few weeks later. But now He was more probably immediately desirous of working a miracle of this kind, in order, as has been said, that the fame of it might reach His Precursor in his prison, and produce his last effort to contribute to the glory of his Lord.

Although the miracle of which the narrative is to follow was thus one of those wrought more especially and singly for the purpose of attesting, in the most striking way, the Divine Mission of our Lord, it by no means follows from this that the instance of the exercise of His mercy which it contained was not also carefully chosen. None of the circumstances were left to hazard. Thus, it was not in any place where our Lord was already very well known, and, as far as we are told, He did not re-visit Naim after the miracle. Thus the miracle had an air of entire absence of preparation or design. It might have taken place in any of the almost countless towns and villages of Galilee. The persons

in whose favour it was wrought were, as it seems, unknown to the company of our Lord's followers. They had nothing to plead for them, except the touching incidents of their case. Thus this miracle comes to be one of the most beautiful revelations remaining to us of the extreme tenderness and compassionateness of the Sacred Heart of our Lord. Then, as it were, He had to choose a subject for a great work of mercy which was required for the evidence of His Divine power. He chose it, not in any conspicuous spot in the Holy Land, not in Jerusalem or in Capharnaum, not in the case of persons whose position would have given a greater publicity and splendour to the work He was to do, not in His own family, or among the relations of those most dear to Him, but He chose it by the wayside, as it were, among comparative strangers, and yet with the most delicate consideration for the circumstances in the case which called upon His ineffable compassionateness.

'And it came to pass afterwards,' says St. Luke, that is, after the visit to Capharnaum which had been marked by the healing of the Centurion's servant, 'that He went into a city called Naim, and there went with Him His disciples, and a great multitude.' The language of the Evangelist shows that it was on one of the ordinary missionary circuits, and that our Lord was accompanied, as usual, by His disciples, the Apostles, and others, and by multitudes who had flocked from all sides, to hear His teaching and to witness His miracles, 'And when He came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, a dead man was carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow.' Thus, in the fewest words, does St. Luke paint for us the picture of the desolation which the death of this young man had left behind it. His mother had lost the staff of her life in her husband, and

now the burthen of her bereavement was heaped up and crowned by the death of her only son. The widow mentioned in the Second Book of Kings, who was sent by Joab to persuade David to recall Absalom, had feigned her story in the most touching terms, and she had told the King, ‘They seek to quench my spark which is left, and will leave my husband no name nor remainder upon the earth.’¹ What this woman had painted as the greatest possible calamity which could befall her, had already fallen on this widow of Naim. She was utterly alone on earth, and the name of her husband and family were blotted out. Her old age could be cheered by no care of her boy, in return for the love of both of his parents. She was following him to the grave, and then all would be over for her. She was well known, perhaps a person of some position in the city, for ‘a great multitude of the city was with her.’ Her calamity, and the natural sympathy which it called forth, thus brought our Lord the occasion of working a miracle that would be witnessed and attested by an immense multitude.

The circumstances made it natural and inevitable that some thousands of people were present, the crowds accompanying our Lord meeting the crowds which poured forth from the city gates. And, if the former multitudes were prepared to see almost any imaginable miracle without surprise, the inhabitants of Naim were witnesses provided, whose testimony could not be called in doubt, as that of enthusiastic followers of the wonderworking Prophet. In this respect this miracle stands out in the catalogue of our Lord’s wonders, like those of the multiplication of the loaves. Again, the occasion was one of singular solemnity, and all hearts were prepared for the holy influences which grace might exercise, by

¹ 2 Kings xiv. 7.

the natural compassion for the poor widow, and the holy rite of sepulture which was to be performed. All these circumstances add to the beauty of the incident, but we may suppose that the main motive in the Sacred Heart of our Lord was His infinitely tender compassion. It appears, also, that the spot itself was exactly fitted for a miracle which was to have a large number of attentive witnesses. The road ascending to the gate of Naim enabled the multitudes who were following Him to see our Lord above them, and the crowd that followed the bier had the whole scene before their eyes.

'Whom when the Lord had seen, being moved with mercy towards her, He said to her, Weep not.' The Evangelist speaks of the compassion of our Lord as the moving cause of the action which followed. The whole of the miracle is as it were contained in those few words, 'Weep not,' and in the compassion which dictated them. For the compassion of God can never be inoperative, except when men place, of their own malice, an obstacle in the way of His mercy. Our Lord does not require of this poor mourner any confession of faith in His Divine power, but He leads her on to the formation of faith in Him by the gentle words with which He begins His intervention. For these words might have been addressed to her by an ordinary consoler, who had no power to assuage her grief beyond that of kind words, sympathy, and the suggestion of holy thoughts and motives of resignation. But for our Lord to say, 'Weep not,' implied something more. It implied that He was about to console her grief by taking away altogether its cause. First He spoke to the mourning mother, and that simple action must have arrested attention, and made the multitude of the disciples alive with the expectation of some marvellous work of mercy and love. Or, it may be, that they thought He might

take the occasion to make the accident, as it appeared to be, of His meeting the funeral procession just at this point, the subject of some fresh Divine teaching concerning the frailty of life, the certainty and swiftness of death, and the great truths of the world beyond the grave.

Thus it was that the multitude paused, and there was a hush of attention, all eyes bent towards our Lord and the widow. Then 'He came near and touched the bier. And they that carried it, stood still.' Thus the multitudes also that were passing out of the gates after the mother and the bier, were arrested and their attention drawn to what was passing. Our Lord did not command the bearers, but they were moved by His majesty and the authority which He could not lay aside, and they obeyed Him instinctively, thus furnishing on their own part something of the conditions necessary for the miracle, at least in ordinary cases of the kind, in the way of obedience grounded upon faith. And then there was another short pause. The bearers stood motionless, the multitude on both sides, the followers of our Lord and the mourners from the city, waiting in silent awe, the mother already full of the peace, resignation, and hope which a few words of all-powerful consolation had breathed into her heart. Then the solemn words were heard in the midst of the silence: 'Young man ! I say to thee, Arise.'

The words were not heard by the listeners in the vast multitude before their effect was seen. It would seem that the body was not bound round, as in the case of Lazarus—the young man lay on his bier as if on a bed. He moved instantly, sprang up into a sitting posture, and began to speak. Life was there, perfect, conscious intelligent life. He sat up of himself, and began at once to speak, showing that he knew where

he was and what had taken place. It would seem as if his words must have been an answer to those which our Lord had addressed to him, the word of Divine authority and power, commanding him, as the creature of his God, the Lord of life and death, to return to life. As our Lord had said to the priests at Jerusalem, so had it been. The dead had heard the voice of the Son of Man and had lived. And the first words of the raised young man may have been words of obedience and thankfulness to his Saviour. This soul had seen the realities of the world beyond the grave, but yet his lot had not been finally settled, there had been some delay in the Judgment, and he had not been hurried at once either to Purgatory, if he had died in grace, or to the place of eternal torment, if he had died in sin. His eyes had been opened to the great truths, the value of the soul, the miseries of this world, the poisonous nature of sin, the rights and the justice of God. He had much indeed to say, but the greatest of all the truths that had flashed upon his mind was that of the Work and Office and Person of our Divine Lord. But our Lord was not there to listen to what this poor rescued soul might have to say to Him by way of gratitude, but to testify to His Divine Mission by a great work of mercy and Divine power. He thought first of the poor mother, compassion for whom had had so large a share in the selection of her son for this singular and most magnificent grace. 'He gave him to his mother.' And there the Evangelist leaves the story, with that severe reserve and simplicity which characterize him. It is left to meditative souls to feed their hearts and imaginations on the joy of the mother in her son and of the son in his mother. Nor are we told, either about this young man, or about the other subjects of our Lord's marvellous works of mercy, how they afterwards used the life or the health, or the

faculties, which had been restored to them. The Evangelists are engaged in their peculiar work of furnishing to the Church of God for all time a summary of the sayings and doings of our Lord, and they do not dwell on the history of any one but Him.

A miracle so beautiful as this, of the raising of the widow's son to life, has naturally suggested to pious commentators on the Gospel history a number of contemplations, by which the incidents related by the Evangelist are applied to that spiritual death of the soul, of which the death of the body is a figure, and to the restoration of the life of the soul, which is wrought by the grace of God in penitence, through the merits of our Blessed Lord. Before examining these contemplations, we may remind ourselves first that, though our Blessed Lady is not mentioned as having been present on this occasion, it is not likely but that the thought of her, so like in her condition to this poor widow, and so soon to be bereaved of her only Son by the malice of His enemies, should have been present to our Lord at this time, and have added to the tenderness of the compassion which is assigned by St. Luke as the moving influence of His Sacred Heart. She had been the actual intercessor with our Lord, in the case of His first outward miracle at the marriage at Cana, and she had been His instrument in the first spiritual miracle which He had wrought when a Child in her womb, upon the soul of His Precursor, St. John. It is natural, certainly, to think that the thought of her was also a motive power in the selection of this widow as the recipient of His bounty on this occasion—the first, as has been said, on which it is recorded that He raised any one from the dead. He may well have seen her in the poor mourner who followed her only son to the grave, as she was to receive His own Body when taken down from the

Cross, and to stand by when Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, with the other disciples, laid Him in the new sepulchre. She was also to be the first to whom He was to appear, when He had risen again by His own power, from the grave. In all these particulars, the shadow of Mary seems to rest upon this widowed mother.

It is well to remember also that the great instances in the Old Testament, in which similar miracles had been wrought by the great Prophets Elias and Eliseus, were like this miracle in the circumstance that they too were wrought in favour of widows. And it is remarkable to notice the contrast which exists between the laboriousness, so to speak, of the miracles of Elias and of Eliseus, and the supreme and Divine ease with which this resurrection was brought about by our Lord. Elias cried vehemently to the Lord and stretched himself on the dead child three times, before the miracle in his case was granted. Eliseus first of all sent his servant Giezi with his staff to lay upon the dead child of the Sunamitess, and that was of no avail. Then he went himself, ‘And going in he shut the door upon him and the child, and prayed to the Lord. And he went up and lay upon the child, and he put his mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hand, and he bowed himself upon the child and the child’s flesh grew warm. Then he returned and walked in the house, once to and fro, and he went up and lay upon him, and the child gaped seven times and opened his eyes.’² For the miracles of the Prophets were won by prayer, and were granted to great exertions and entreaties, but our Lord had but to speak the word and He was obeyed, whether by the winds and the sea, or by the devils, or by disease, or by death itself. Nor is it

² 3 Kings xvii. 21; 4 Kings iv. 33, 34.

improbable that this miracle was wrought under these circumstances and with these conditions, with express reference to the famous miracles of Elias and Eliseus, and that the selection of the widow's son, in this case also, may have had a special meaning in God's Providence, apart from the peculiarly moving sorrows of the mother, in order that the people, so well acquainted as they were with the wonders wrought by the Prophets, might have their attention drawn to the immense difference between the power exercised by His servants and that of which our Lord was master.

For the mystical and figurative meaning of this miracle we cannot do better than follow the devout Ludolph of Saxony. The youth who is carried forth to burial is the man dead in mortal sin. The mother who follows him to the grave is the Church, whose children all the faithful are. She loves each one of her children so tenderly, that each one is to her as if he were her only child, as our Lord is said by the Saints, following St. Paul, to have died for each one as if he had been the only one to be redeemed by His Death. She is called a widow, because she has been deprived of her Spouse by death, and is now in a place of exile, separated from His embraces. The dead man is carried out to burial, when the purpose of sin is executed in action. The four bearers of the dead are the four affections of the soul, joy and sorrow, hope and fear. Men, says St. Bernard, love what they ought not, and fear what they should not, they sorrow vainly, and they rejoice still more vainly. For it is the love of sin, or the fear of penance, or the hope of time for repentance, or the presumptuous hope of the mercy of God, which leads them to sin. Or the four bearers are four things which encourage men to continue in sin, the confidence of a longer life, or the habit of considering the sins of others and not our own,

which makes us avoid correction, or the foolish hope of repenting by-and-bye, or the confidence in the mercy of God, which makes men see how long He leaves sinners unpunished, and so they become more inclined to sin. Or it may be understood that a man is carried on to the death of his soul in sin by carnal desires, or by the flatteries of false friends, or the silence of men who ought to correct him, as his prelates, or by anything else that nourishes sin in him. And the gate of the city through which the dead man is carried out, is any one of the senses by means of which sin is manifested. To sow discord among brethren, for instance, or to speak in commendation of wickedness, is to carry out the dead by the gate of the mouth. To look on a woman to lust after her, is to do the same by the gate of the eyes. In the same way the gate may be the gate of the ears, or any other. The bier is the conscience, on which the sinner rests, though uneasily. There are three signs of a temporal death, the impotence to move or act, the state of utter insensibility, and the stiffness and rigidity which comes after the spirit has fled. So to be unable to do any good thing is the sign of spiritual death, and so it is with insensibility to warnings and admonitions, and with the rigidity of the soul, by which a man is impotent either to obey God or to compassionate his neighbour. Pride takes away the power of doing good, lust takes away the sensibility to warnings, avarice makes men hard to God and to man.

In the same way the three things which are recorded of this young man, when raised to life, are significant of the signs of spiritual resuscitation. The sitting up again is contrition, by which we rise from the state of prostration in sin, the speaking is significant of confession, by which a man becomes his own accuser, and the restoration of the young man to his mother signifies

satisfaction. By this means a sinner is restored to his mother the Church, the communion of the faithful. Then again there is a spiritual meaning in the process by which the young man was restored to life. Our Blessed Saviour draws near, when He sends to the soul of the sinner some preventive grace, some desire of salvation. He touches the bier, when He softens the heart and conscience of the sinner to penitence, and brings him to know himself, and then he arises from his sin. ‘And we must know,’ continues Ludolph, ‘that the Holy Ghost has willed that sin should be signified by death, in order to show how greatly sin is to be shunned, and how deeply it must be mourned when it has been committed. One who sees his friend to be in mortal sin should mourn over him as if he were dead, and indeed more. As we must so greatly fear death and sin, and greatly grieve over it when committed, so in the same way and degree must we greatly desire the conversion of the sinner and rejoice over it when it has been brought about. Pray therefore, O sinner, to the Lord, that He may raise thee from the death of sin, and restore thee to His holy Church to the praise and glory of His name.’

The result of the miracle is dwelt upon by St. Luke with unusual stress. ‘And there came a great fear on them all, and they glorified God, saying a great Prophet is risen up amongst us, and God hath visited His people.’ This great miracle therefore completely answered the purpose for which it is probable that it was wrought by our Lord. We hear of no cavilling or unbelief in this large multitude. For a time the voice of His enemies was hushed. The whole multitude was filled with that holy rejoicing awe which pervades large masses of men when they are full of faith and are collected together for some holy purpose, such as a

pilgrimage, or the celebration of a great festival, or of some deliverance of the Church from her enemies, and when they have felt very nearly and unmistakeably the working of Divine power, whether by external miracle or by the effusion of the grace of conversion as the fruit of some Apostolic preaching. In such times the faith of each is as it were multiplied by the faith of all—each one helps his neighbour to greater fervour, and the general feeling is chiefly one of fear, but without terror. Men feel that God has been and is among them, and this feeling in our present state cannot but have something of fear about it, on account of the uncertainty in which we all must be as to the state of our own consciences.

But this reverent fear of the multitude was not such as to hinder them from breaking out into thanksgivings and rejoicings, glorifying God for the great work which they had witnessed, and which they could attribute to no one but to Him. The words in which they manifested their praise and glorification of God are twofold in the record of St. Luke, and in both cases there is reference to the promise of God and the expectations of the people as to His mercy towards them. ‘A great Prophet has risen up amongst us.’ These words may imply that a prophet of the highest class had been manifested by the miracle, a prophet like Elias and Eliseus, of whose miracles this was a repetition, with so many circumstances of additional splendour; or they may refer to the express promise made by Moses of a great Prophet like to himself, by whom he meant the Messias, though it is not certain that the Jews of our Lord’s time had not come to distinguish between this Prophet and the promised Son of David. As it is St. Luke who is writing, and as his Gospel is mainly addressed to the Gentile Churches, it is not conclusive

against this last meaning that he does not say ‘the Prophet’ rather than a great Prophet. The second thing that the multitudes expressed in their praise of God on this occasion was that He had visited His people, words which remind us of the same expression in the Canticle of St. Zachary on the birth of his son, St. John Baptist. In that canticle the word can mean no one less than the Messias Himself, for it is there added not only that God had visited His people, but that He has redeemed them. The lowest sense of these words, in the mouths of this crowd of disciples and of friends of the happy widow of Naim, is that which signifies no more than one of the many great visitations of mercy vouchsafed, from time to time, by God to His people. The highest sense is that in which the words are understood of the great Prophet promised by Moses himself, whether they distinguished between Him and the Messias or not, and of that supreme visitation of which Zachary spoke when he rejoiced over the advent of God in the flesh, Who had dwelt so many weeks under his roof, as a Child in the womb of His Blessed Virgin Mother, ‘through the bowels of mercy of our God, whereby the Orient from on high hath visited us, to enlighten them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace.’

As the circumstances of this miracle were so divinely chosen in other ways, so especially were they most admirably fitted for the end which our Lord appears to have had in view when He worked it, namely, for the speedy and wide propagation of the news that He had at length manifested His power by raising one from the dead. The miracle had an immense number of witnesses from all parts through which our Lord had passed, for it was now customary for people to follow Him from one city to another, and a large part of the

population of Naim itself had seen the wonderful act of mercy. In all simple populations such tidings fly on the wings of the winds. 'And the rumour of Him went forth throughout all Judea, and throughout all the country round about.' The whole of the Holy Land was filled with the report of this miracle, and it reached even the outlying border regions by which Judea and Galilee were encompassed. How it struck on the hearts of the envious priests at Jerusalem, or of the crafty servants of Herod on the lake of Galilee, we are not told. But the next words of St. Matthew on which we are to comment show us how the tidings reached even the Blessed Precursor in his dungeon, and sounded in his ears like a special message from Heaven.

CHAPTER XIII.

Last Witness of St. John Baptist.

St. Matt. xi. 2—6 ; St. Luke vii. 17—23 ; *Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 52.

THE miracle at Naim was, in the opinion of the people generally, by far the greatest work of the kind that had been wrought by our Lord. He was already known all over the land as a mighty worker of miracles of various degrees, but the language in which the Evangelists speak of the effect of this one great wonder is stronger than that used on any former occasion. Nor is this a matter of surprise to us. For nothing in the order of marvellous works of mercy can come near, in the common opinion of men, to the raising of the dead to life. Such a miracle seems to be in an order by itself. This power is by no means so frequently granted to the Saints of God as that of other miracles. And, if it be true, we are led by the silence of the Evangelists to think, that this was the first instance of the exercise of this power by our Blessed Lord, it is very natural to suppose that the sensation which it created all over the country would be quite different from any that had been occasioned by former works of our Lord, however magnificent and multitudinous. But the particular effect of this miracle with which we are now concerned, is that which is specially mentioned by St. Luke in the few words in which he speaks of the ‘rumour which went forth concerning our Lord’ in consequence of this great display

of power. He adds, ‘And the disciples of John told him of all these things.’

We are thus taken back in thought to the holy Baptist, who had now for a year or more been a close prisoner in the fortress adjoining the palace in which Herod the Tetrarch resided. St. Luke in another place gives us a picture of the Blessed Precursor of our Lord in his prison life, which was so soon to be terminated by martyrdom. He tells us how Herod had imprisoned St. John on account of his open denunciation of the incestuous intercourse between the Tetrarch and Herodias, which was now publicly obtruded on the world under the name of marriage, but which scandalized the people as well as the more religious classes to such an extent, that Herod was afraid to leave at liberty a man of so much influence as St. John, lest troubles might arise if the popular feeling were stirred up by the powerful voice of one who was held as a Prophet. St. John in his prison was an object of fear and hatred to Herodias, for guilty persons of that sort, however powerful, are never free from fear, and they show the uneasiness of their conscience by constant attempts to rid themselves by violence, open or secret, of those whose presence is a rebuke to them, and from whose influence they anticipate trouble. The vindictive spite of the adulteress did not sleep, notwithstanding the chains and dungeon of St. John. She was not satisfied, and her resentment was ere long to have its full glut in the murder of the Prophet. Probably one of the elements of the alarm of Herodias on the score of St. John was the influence which he still exercised over her weak though unscrupulous paramour. Herod was a man of the world, probably himself the seduced rather than the seducer, a man not without some good instincts and some ideas of what was right and just. In many things

he followed the advice given him by St. John, and the Prophet was allowed, as it seems, to have free intercourse with his friend and disciples, who might minister to his few wants and continue to be guided by him. The cruelty of Herod was the cruelty of a voluptuary, which does not exclude occasional acts of generosity and good nature.

The blessed St. John had only been occupied in his course of preaching for not more than a few months, and the greater part of his life had been spent in the desert in seclusion and prayer, contemplation, and mortification. It would seem to be little matter to him, whether his cell, so to speak, were the dungeon in Herod's prison, or the cave on the desert or on mountain side. His wants were few, his happiness was in communion with his God, and this he could practise as well in one place as in another. Nor had he any ambition, we may suppose, to continue his course of popular preaching, for the time of his ministry, which was essentially transient, had gone by, he had finished his work of the preparation of men's hearts for our Lord, and now He had come whose shoe's latchet he was not worthy to unloose. But a heart like his could not but be on fire with zeal for souls. In his prison St. John watched the progress of the preaching of the Kingdom of Heaven. Many a work of wonder would have been related to him by his disciples, and he would have heard of our Lord's gracious words and heavenly teaching, of the authority with which He spoke, and the multitudes that followed Him. Later on St. John might have heard of the opposition which had sprung up, and which threatened to bar the onward path of the new Teacher. His disciples might have told him of what had passed at Jerusalem at the last Pasch, and the court of the Tetrarch would receive some reports of the attitude now taken up by his political servants. Then

it would be said how for a time little had been said or heard of the Teacher against Whom so powerful a coalition had been formed. He had withdrawn from the spots where His presence had been most familiar, though there were reports of His continued preaching on the outskirts of the towns, and it was said that He was still dangerous. He had not lost His hold on the common people. Perhaps St. John may have heard of our Lord's sudden re-appearance at Capharnaum, but it is certain that the miracle of Naim reached his ears, the first instance of which he could have heard of the raising of the dead to life.

It is impossible to suppose that St. John could be indifferent to all that was brought to him by his disciples concerning our Blessed Lord at this time. He may well have seen in the rise of the opposition to our Lord on the part of the authorities of the holy people a danger to the faith of those who were still under his guidance as his disciples. If the authorities at Jerusalem were beginning to use their immense influence with the people against Jesus Christ, he might have felt that this was a call to exert his own influence more openly on the other side. We are not told much about the disciples of the Baptist, but there seems no reason for thinking that they were in any way at all indisposed to our Lord. Their case may have been parallel to that of the near blood relations of our Lord, of whom we had lately to speak. We are sometimes inclined to judge rather impatiently of men who do not at once accept the evidences of the Church, or close at once with the whispers of a lofty vocation. It is well that we have in the Gospels cases which may rebuke this impatience. God dealt with the Brethren of our Lord, as they are called, in one way, and He dealt with the disciples of St. John in another, and in another again with such future disciples at

Jerusalem, in the very midst of the priestly hostility to our Lord, as Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, and Gamaliel, perhaps with St. Stephen also, and with the still greater soul of St. Paul. If there was any hesitation as to our Lord's Mission and dignity on the part of these disciples of the Precursor—though we do not know that there was—it would be something like what is found in the case of persons who are being gradually led on by the good, positive, though imperfect, teaching of communities outside the Church which have retained large shreds of Catholic doctrine, or much more, by the personal influence and teaching of some leader of thought on whom the full light has not yet dawned. There will always be souls in such a stage of spiritual progress, as not yet to have been ripened for the full sacrifice of conversion, under circumstances when conversion implies great material losses and strong social persecution, and others, too, in whom the intellectual process of laying aside the prejudices and false teaching of generations is slow in attaining its completion. Again, these souls have often a work to do in influencing others, a work which must have its time. Providence is very tender with such souls, so long as they retain their simplicity and their good faith, and the tenderness of Providence in their regard is the method chosen by Infinite Wisdom for their final salvation or perfection, a method full of beautiful order and delicate adaptation of means to ends.

These disciples of St. John, of whom we are now speaking, were on their way to a full faith in our Lord's Divine Person, not by the teaching of flesh and blood, but by the silent gradual teaching of the Father of all in His Providence. It was the office of St. John to minister in his own way to the gradual formation and expansion of the faith in their hearts, thus aiding the

work of the Eternal Father in them. If the opposition of the priests and scribes of Jerusalem quickened the anxiety of the Baptist concerning those who were so dear to him, and over whom he had so delicate a charge, the news of the great manifestations of Divine power on the part of our Lord came to him as a fresh delight and consolation, furnishing him with a precious opportunity of doing a last service to the cause of the Master Whom he so devotedly loved. Here was a new argument for St. John to use. He might, it is true, have taken up the argument himself, and have urged it home to the disciples who yet remained to him. But in the wisdom of Providence a better way was ordained than even the words of the Baptist himself to disciples however devoted to him. In his own deep humility, St. John would rejoice above everything in being able to send his followers to our Lord, and let them hear from Himself what He might say, and see for themselves what He might do.

Again, in doing this St. John was acting directly in accordance with the method of Divine Providence in the manifestation of our Lord, as laid down by our Lord Himself. It will be remembered that on the great occasion on which our Lord, after the miracle on the man at the Prophetic Pool, unfolded to the Jewish teachers and rulers the series of evidences with which it had pleased His Eternal Father to accredit His Mission, He had spoken of the witness borne to Him by St. John the Baptist as the first kind of evidence to which those who were then questioning Him and accusing Him ought to have paid attention. They had sent unto John, He told them, and ‘he gave testimony to the truth.’ He was a burning and shining light, and they were willing for a season to rejoice in his light. ‘But,’ He added, ‘He had a greater testimony than that of John.’ This greater testi-

mony was that of the works which His Father gave Him to perfect. ‘The works themselves which I do, give testimony of Me that the Father hath sent Me.’ Thus, in the order of Divine Providence, our Lord was to be first attested by the witness of St. John, and then by the still greater witness of His own miracles. This witness was greater than that of John, because the witness of John was that of a man, while the testimony of the works was that of God. The works as such were not precisely the Words of God, the Voice of God, as it was heard at the time of our Lord’s Baptism and afterwards at the Transfiguration, but they were works which none but God, or One with Whom God was, could do, and thus they attested the truth which our Lord declared them to attest, that the Father had sent Him. He was therefore to be listened to and accepted as the Messenger of the Father.

This same order of Divine Providence as to the various testimonies to our Lord was now illustrated by the remarkable action of St. John Baptist himself. It was the great desire of St. John, as has already been shown more than once, to pass on his disciples to our Lord, and, as long as they existed as a separate body, to make them a school by means of which converts were gained who might afterwards go on to the teaching of our Lord and to faith in Him. In order that this might be done more securely, it was right that St. John should follow the order of Divine Providence, and guide them to our Lord by means of the appointed proofs of our Lord’s Mission. Thus it was natural that when he knew for certain that our Lord’s Mission had been accredited by miracles, he should give his disciples the opportunity of using this testimony for their own advantage. For himself, it is impossible to think that he needed the proof of what he had so faithfully taught

and declared. At the time at which we have now arrived in the narrative of this second year of our Lord's Public Ministry, it would seem as if St. John had come to the determination of formally sending a deputation of his disciples to our Lord in order that they might be convinced of the truth concerning Him to which St. John had himself so often borne witness. The incident is introduced by St. Luke, as has been said, with words which connect it immediately with the miracle lately wrought on the son of the widow at Naim. St. Luke's words imply that the blessed Baptist waited till his disciples of their own accord spoke to him of the mighty works of our Lord. It need not be supposed that there was any difficulty in leading them on to the belief in our Lord, but they still clung to their old teacher, and it was his business, as it was his delight, to help them on. St. Matthew, who is the only other Evangelist who mentions this incident, introduces it with words still more striking, though he does not mention the significant fact of the disciples of St. John having spoken to their master concerning our Lord. He tells us that 'John heard in his prison the works of Christ,' or rather the 'works of the Christ.' Nowhere else in his Gospel does St. Matthew speak of our Lord in these words, as simply of the Christ. And we must therefore suppose that he intends us to understand him on this occasion as pointing out that the works of which he is speaking were the works of the Christ, in the strictest sense of the words, that is, the works which belonged to the Christ as He had been promised by the Prophets.

This then was the occasion of this embassy, as it may be called, in which the great Precursor solemnly appealed to our Lord to give a definite answer to the surmises and conjectures and doubts concerning Himself, which were current in the hearts of men wherever the

wonderful tidings of His teaching and miracles had been carried. It need not be supposed that St. John considered his own disciples alone in this message. He may have had the intention of convincing others, by means of the disciples whom he sent, for it is natural to think that the adhesion of a body which must have been held in so much respect, would add greatly to the prestige of the new Teacher. No one would be able to say that St. John was in any way opposed to our Lord. And we find no traces of such an allegation in the Sacred Scriptures. John is always spoken of as testifying to our Lord, as saying great things of our Lord. The terms of the message of the Baptist are the same in the two Evangelists who relate this incident—‘Art Thou He that art to come, or look we for another?’ It is interesting to note how the same question may be put in a captious, and in a devout and simple, manner by different persons, according to the state of their heart. This question was in the minds of all men at this time, and our Lord was always practically giving it an answer. But it was the complaint of His enemies that He would not tell them openly Who He was. He let His works speak for Him, and He relied on the evidences with which, as has been said, the Father in His providence accredited His Mission. He would not be dictated to, as we shall see, as to signs from Heaven, or even as to plain open declarations for which those who sought for them were not fit, and which, indeed, they only sought for with a view of using them against Him. When at last the time came for Him to be adjured by the living God to tell them whether He was the Christ, He did so, and we know what was the result in His enemies of that open declaration. They would not receive His testimony concerning Himself, and yet, as He had said on a former occasion, when they

had challenged Him as bearing witness to Himself, He answered, ‘Although I give testimony of Myself, My testimony is true, for I know whence I come and whither I go, but you know not whence I come or whither I go.’¹

Nor can it be admitted as a rule, concerning the messengers of God, even inferior in authority to our Lord, that they are not to be listened to in what they say of themselves. It was His great humility, and much more His consummate prudence, that made Him say so little concerning Himself. And we know that even to His disciples He did not speak plainly and openly, until quite the end of His sojourn with them. It is also to be noted, that the truth of our Lord’s Mission, and especially the truth of His Divine Personality, which was most clearly and continually claimed by Himself, may be most fairly and cogently urged on those who already admit Him to have the evidences of Divine Mission, such as miracles and the like, the fulfilment of prophecy, and other such demonstrations, because it is impossible to think of God that He would so accredit a Person Who could speak the slightest untruth concerning Himself. And this is, in the same way, to be taught concerning the Catholic Church, that she after all is the witness to her own prerogatives, and what she claims for herself, as to her position in the world, and as to the obedience which is due to her, in whatever order, must be a true claim. Thus, if our Lord had answered the message of the blessed Precursor by a simple affirmation of His Divine Mission, He would not have made any unreasonable claim. But as has been said, the order of Providence was, that the Divine character of His Mission was to be attested by miracles, and therefore it was to them that He appealed. But in the arguments of Christian apologists or missionaries or preachers, for such

¹ St. John viii. 14.

a truth as the Divinity of our Lord, it is perfectly reasonable to appeal to His own sayings concerning Himself, and, as it was put some years ago by a great preacher in France, we must believe that He was God, because He said it Himself.

In answer to the messengers of St. John on this great occasion, our Lord did two things. They found Him, as it seems, teaching the multitude, or they were taken by Him to be present at such a teaching. The crowds were thronging round Him, as has been elsewhere described, and power or virtue went forth from Him to heal them all. He took the occasion to work a number of visible and obvious miracles. ‘In that same hour,’ St. Luke tells us, ‘He cured many of their diseases and hurts, and evil spirits; and to many who were blind He gave sight.’ That is, He set before the messengers of St. John the evidence of His miracles. This must have struck them with greater force, because it had not been in the Providence of God that St. John himself should work any miracle. This evidence of Divine Mission had been vouchsafed to many of the ancient prophets, some of whose miracles are only less wonderful than those of our Lord Himself. But it had not been granted in the case of St. John, whose mission was simply to awaken consciences, by the preaching of known truths of the moral order, and whose great power lay in the evident sanctity of his life and character, and in the force of his direct and severe preaching. Thus the evidence of miracles was kept, in this stage of the economy of the Incarnation, for our Lord Himself, and it was afterwards, as we shall see, extended to the Apostles, even before the time of the Passion. This then would have been a most cogent argument to be used by St. John when the messengers returned to tell him what they had seen and heard, that is, what others

told them of their own experience as to the miraculous gifts exercised by our Lord.

But our Lord also added a further proof, which was in a manner necessary for the completion of that which was furnished by the miracles. It has been explained elsewhere, that miracles by themselves may not uniformly be a perfect proof of the Divine character of a mission, such as that of our Lord and the Church, unless they are accompanied by the further witness of prophecy, which fixes the evidence of that mission. When St. John had put his question to our Lord in the words used by the disciples of the former, he had distinctly alluded to the promises and the prophecies. He had not said simply, ‘Art Thou a Divine Teacher’—but ‘Art Thou He that is to come? Art Thou He for Whom we are looking?’ These words imply that One was to come, and they consequently invite a reference to the marks which were to characterize Him when He did come. Thus our Lord was enabled by the prudent question of His Precursor, to add this further confirmation to the witness of the miracles. He did not do this in so many words, that is, He did not appeal directly to any of the many prophecies concerning Himself, quoting the words of the Prophet, but He did the same thing in His own way, ever seeking to exercise humility and meekness, by simply answering the messengers in the words of one of the Prophets, ‘And answering He said to them, Go and relate to John what you have heard and seen: the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are made clean, the deaf hear, the dead rise again, to the poor the Gospel is preached, and blessed is he whosoever shall not be scandalized in Me.’

These words are taken from the prophecies of Isaias, though they do not all occur in the same place. They are rather an accumulation of notes of the Messias, as

given by the prophet, which would sum up in a convenient way his testimony concerning our Lord. In his thirty-seventh chapter Isaias had described the days of the Messias thus : ‘Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap like a hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall be free, for waters are broken out in the desert, and streams in the wilderness.’ The other great passage in Isaias, in which the characteristics of the Messias and His times are described, had been already quoted by our Lord in His discourse in the synagogue of Nazareth, on the Sabbath-day on which He had given His fellow-citizens so much offence by refusing to work miracles to satisfy their curiosity, and to put them, as it were, on a level with the people of Capharnaum. ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord hath anointed me. He hath sent me to preach to the meek, to heal the contrite of heart, and to preach a release to the captives, and deliverance to those that are shut up.’ This is in the sixty-first chapter of Isaias. The words now used by our Lord, therefore, are almost entirely taken from the prophet, though they are not a simple quotation of any single passage. They would serve the purpose of the Precursor, if he wished to show in detail that the very works of which his disciples had been the witnesses, were exactly those which had been promised as evidence of the Messias and His Divine Mission, while at the same time the appeal, so to call it, made by our Lord was not formally to the prophet himself so much as to the works of which nevertheless the prophet had spoken. Thus the twofold witness of works of miraculous power and mercy, and of the special prediction of those works, was kept open to the use of the blessed Precursor in his prison.

It must be remembered, also, that St. John had not distinctly referred to the prophecies in his message of inquiry. He had only said, ‘Art Thou He that art to come, or do we look for another?’ For the expectation of the whole human race, since the Fall, has ever been for a Deliverer and Redeemer. Even if the prophecies and promise had not existed, there would always have been a craving in the hearts and consciences of men for some One like our Lord. No true idea could be entertained, even partially, of the goodness of God, of the Power and Wisdom and Mercy which are witnessed to by His revelations of Himself in the visible creation and in Providence, without the suggestion of the hope of some interference on His part for the relief of the deep miseries of the condition of man. Nor could any true idea be formed of those miseries themselves, without its including the discernment of the greater gravity of the moral evils of mankind, in comparison with their physical sufferings. In this way the diseases and maladies which afflicted so large a portion of the human race, and made earth a vast lazarus-house, were but imperfect representations and types of the moral maladies by which the souls of men were sick even unto death. Thus the miseries mentioned by the prophets were very easily understood in their moral significance, and the blindness, or lameness, or leprosy, or diseases, of which there were so many instances on every side at every time, were easily taken as figures of the incapacity to see the truth, or to walk in the path of justice, or to hear the inspirations of God, or the voice of conscience, and so on. The whole human race yearned for a Physician Who might have power to cure its manifold moral diseases, far more grievous in themselves than those which afflict the body, and calling piteously on the mercy of God Who had made the soul which they infected, degraded,

and made its own worst torturer, not perishable like the mortal body, but endowed with immortality like His own, the prospect of which was awful indeed if there were to be for it no healing. He that was to come must be One Who could do this, whether He came with physical power of healing or not. In this sense the words of St. John are for ever sounding in the ears of the Church, which represents our Lord : ‘Art Thou He that art to come, or do we look for another?’

And the answer to the question is to be found in the power which the religion and system of our Lord have shown, to heal every sickness and every disease of human nature and of the condition of mankind. It is found in the satisfaction that they give to all the cravings of human nature, moral, intellectual, spiritual, answering exactly to every woe by an adequate cure. And the remedies provided by our Lord for all our manifold maladies are beautifully expressed in the words which He quoted from the Prophet. The blind see, for the moral and spiritual darkness is dispelled, and the simplest Catholic child knows more about God, and the soul, and the conditions of salvation, and the means of grace, and the Law of God, and the issues of eternity, than all the philosophers of the ancient world. The lame walk, for the practice of Christian virtues, and even of Christian perfection, is easy to those who have the light and guidance of the Holy Ghost and the Catholic Church, and the powerful aids and supports of the Christian sacraments. The lepers are made clean, for the foul stains and contaminations of sin are continually washed off from thousands of souls, in the life-giving waters of Baptism and in the blessed Sacrament of Penance. Thousands keep the innocence of their Baptism, and thousands more regain it by the application of the Precious Blood of our Lord to souls

which have been before defaced by sin. The deaf hear, for the conscience is quickened, the ears of the soul are opened to the Christian preaching and the whispers of the Holy Ghost. The dead rise again, when the soul dead in sin is restored to spiritual life. And the final characteristic of His Mission on which our Lord delights to dwell, that which He sums up in the words, 'To the poor the Gospel is preached,' proves that He is He that was to come.

This last characteristic of the true Mission of the Redeemer of the world, the One Whom all men expect and desire, is probably expressed in those words of Isaias in which our Lord is said to be sent to preach to the meek, for so it is translated in the passage of St. Luke in which the quotation is first made by our Lord, and which relates to His teaching in the synagogue of Nazareth. For the right dispositions for the reception of the Gospel teaching are just those of meekness, humility, gentleness, submissiveness, docility, and the like, which are the characteristics also of poverty of spirit, and which are naturally generated, so to say, by the practice and condition of actual poverty in those who do not oppose any hindrance to the workings of grace. For the preaching of the Gospel is with authority, and this is distasteful to pride and arrogance, such as are but too naturally the consequences of riches and independence. Moreover, the whole burthen of the Gospel teaching is that the good things of this world are not true goods, that they are even dangers, and snares, and impositions. This is a truth much more easily realized by the poor than by the rich. Again, the preaching of the Gospel involves the doctrine of the Cross, and this again is more easily received by those who are not weighted by the heavy chains of the good things of this world. And, on the other hand, it

is characteristic of the Gospel that it is the preaching of faith, and faith is a gift which belongs to all alike, which is the same in the learned and in the unlearned, in the simple and in the cultivated, in the ignorant as in the philosopher or the man of science—if indeed it be not actually a difficulty for men trained in the wisdom of this world to submit themselves to the simple authority of the teaching of the Gospel. And the preaching which addresses itself to the poor is always a disinterested teaching, it cannot be the teaching of men who seek to profit by it, or who care for the applause and esteem of men. And any teaching that fulfils the conditions of the doctrine which is to satisfy the wants of humanity, must be a simple teaching, one that can be understood and taken in by the multitude, one which appeals to faith, and one which is thoroughly unworldly in its doctrine.

Our Lord adds to the words which seem to refer to the prophecies in their widest sense, some others which are entirely His own. He has been setting before the disciples of St. John the very evidences of His Mission which He had in vain adduced to the wise and learned Scribes and Priests of Jerusalem. They had turned away from Him, and the main ground of their rejection of this great benefit of God for their salvation was, no doubt, His apparent want of all great and striking qualities in the eyes of the world. To the rulers at Jerusalem He was always the claimant to prophetic powers Who came from an obscure village in Galilee, Who herded with the common people, who had never learnt in the schools of the Scribes, Who was said to be the son of a carpenter, and Whose whole demeanour and bearing bespoke Him only one of the lower people. Greater trials of the same kind were in store for those who might be inclined to put their faith in Him. He

was actually under persecution and proscription, and all who clung to Him were likely enough to suffer under the same treatment with Himself. He knew the whole future, and how the opposition to His teaching was to grow more and more savage and unscrupulous, shrinking at no calumny, and fearing no wickedness for the sake of His destruction. Calvary itself was at no great distance, and it was well therefore to add to the declaration of the evidences for His Mission, a warning as to the possible temptations which would soon beset His followers. There were to be occasions enough of scandal, not, indeed, to the blessed Baptist himself, but to those whom he had sent, or to hundreds of others, who were as yet following our Lord's footsteps, but were in danger of falling away. As it was in our Lord's time, so it has ever been in the history of the Church. The victims of scandal were to be numbered by thousands, and their fall was to give a prophetic meaning to the warning: 'Blessed is he whosoever shall not be scandalized in Me.'

CHAPTER XIV.

Our Lord's witness to St. John Baptist.

St. Matt. xi. 7—19 ; St. Luke vii. 24, 25 ; *Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 53.

THE disciples of St. John had now seen for themselves the wonderful works which were to mark the presence and Person of the promised Messias, according to the prophecies, performed by our Lord, and they could not but be struck with the contrast which existed in this respect between Him and their own master. The gift of miracles, so often vouchsafed to the older prophets, and in later times to the Apostles and other missionaries of the Gospel kingdom, may perhaps have been withheld from St. John for this very purpose, of marking the difference between him and the Messias Whom he was sent to herald. They went on their way to their master, their hearts, we cannot doubt, full of astonishment and joy at the confirmation which so much of St. John's teaching was receiving at the hands of our Lord. Now St. John would have the very best possible opportunity of driving home the evidence which had thus been rendered to our Lord by His Eternal Father, and so of preparing for Him the hearts of those disciples of his own who had remained faithful companions, as far as was allowed them, of his imprisonment. If it had been in the counsels of Providence that we should have had any account of these incidents from the disciples themselves of the Baptist, it is probable that we should have been told how their hearts burned within them as they sped

on their way back to their master, carrying to him the tidings at which beyond all others he would rejoice. St. John spoke of himself, to them or other disciples of his own, as the friend of the Bridegroom, rejoicing to hear the voice of the Bridegroom in His loving converse with His Bride. These gracious miracles of mercy were like some precious bridal gifts of our Lord to His Church, showing her Who He was and the riches with which He was to endow her. It was said afterwards of our Lord and St. John: ‘John did no sign, but all things whatsoever John said of this Man were true.’¹ We may see in this saying, which seems to be quite incidentally recorded, the effect of the teaching of the Baptist on the subject of our Lord’s miracles. And it is natural to believe that the disciples shared the joy of their master, as he expounded to them the Scriptural evidences which had now been brought home to their own senses.

Meanwhile, our Lord was bearing His witness to St. John. He is never to be outdone, as it were, in charity or in the most refined courtesy, if we may use such a word of His dealings with His servants and creatures. If St. John was to speak highly of Him, He would speak, in His turn, highly of St. John, as He will at the Last Day confess before His Father and the holy Angels even the least of His earthly servants who shall confess Him before men. This is the first great reason, perhaps, which may be assigned for the conduct of our Lord in the passage on which we are now to comment. In the words last referred to, our Lord speaks of that confession concerning His servants which He will make before His Father and the Angels, as a reason for hope and courage on the part of those servants in their own confession of Him before men. But we may well

¹ St. John x. 41.

suppose that it is also the greatest delight to His own Sacred Heart to bear such testimony, a thing, therefore, if we may say so of anything at all, that He looks forward to before it is made and rejoices while He is making it. It is perhaps a mark of the singular eminence and dignity of the blessed Baptist among the saints of God, that our Lord should do for him, publicly and immediately, what He will do hereafter in the presence of the whole world for all His saints. ‘Then,’ as St. Paul says, ‘shall every man have his praise of God.’² It is not often that we find, either in the life of our Lord or in Sacred Scriptures, any one praised so highly, or in this way, before his course is run. But it must be remembered, as we shall have occasion to point out more at length presently, that our Lord seems to be speaking more of the office of His Precursor than of his personal sanctity, although the words which He uses certainly imply his faithful discharge of that office. He says, indeed, that St. John was no reed shaken by the wind, but He speaks chiefly of his work, which made him more than a prophet, in having to go immediately before the face of the Incarnate Son of God to prepare the way before Him, and to be sent in the spirit and power of Elias.

Another reason is frequently given for our Lord’s praises of St. John—namely, that there might be some possibility of a mistake, among His own disciples, as to the motives which had prompted His Precursor in the embassy of which we have just heard. It might be thought, perhaps, that St. John had doubted concerning the Mission of our Blessed Lord, and had sent his message, not so much on account of the messengers, as for himself and his own satisfaction. It is possible that there may have been, among our Lord’s auditory, some

² 1 Cor. iv. 5.

persons not higher or clearer in their ideas of St. John's sanctity than the numerous commentators of later days, who are ready to see in this question of the blessed Precursor something like either doubt or impatience. It is not therefore impossible that our Lord may have meant, by His testimony to the Baptist, to do away with any impressions of this kind which may perhaps have been created. If this was the case, it is at all events clear that the purpose of our Lord was not directly expressed, even if it may be gathered from the language in which He speaks of St. John. The whole passage reads rather like a glowing eulogy on the Baptist, called forth from our Lord's Sacred Heart by this last instance of his faithfulness, as shown in the embassy of his disciples, and belonging to the same class of Divine utterances of His to which those rejoicing words of His may be said to belong, which follow soon after in the history, concerning the revelation of the mysteries of the Kingdom to little ones rather than to the wise and prudent.

'And when the messengers of John were departed and went their way,' back to their own master, 'Jesus began to speak to the multitudes concerning John: What went ye out into the desert to see? A reed shaken with the wind? But what went ye out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Behold, they that are clothed in soft garments, in costly apparel, and live delicately, are in the houses of kings. But what went ye out to see? A prophet? Yea, I tell you, and more than a prophet. For this is he of whom it is written, Behold, I send My Angel before Thy Face, who shall prepare Thy way before Thee. For Amen I say to you, there hath not risen up among them that are born of women a greater than John the Baptist, yet he that is the lesser in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than he.'

The first part of this eulogy of our Lord on His Precursor is evidently meant to deny all impressions of St. John which in any way tended to disparage him. The two things which our Lord denies concerning him are that he was like a reed shaken in the wind, and that he had led the delicate and self-indulgent life of a courtier—that is, that he was accessible to the influences of softness and luxury. The desert, especially that part of it which bordered on the Jordan or on the Dead Sea, was full enough of reeds shaken in the wind, and as St. John preached ordinarily in the neighbourhood of the river, for the sake of the administration of Baptism, this feature of the tract of country in which he had been sought by the multitude must have been familiar to them. But it was not for that that they had gone forth into the wilderness, no, nor to see a man who had anything of lightness and instability in his character. This seems to be the meaning of the figure which is used by our Lord. This is one of those expressions of His which passed into the language, so to say, of His Apostles, and although we do not meet the exact image in their writings, we find its traces in such expressions as that of St. Paul, when he tells the Ephesians that we must not be ‘Children tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine;’³ or when he warns the Thessalonians ‘Not to be easily moved from their mind, nor be frightened,’⁴ where he uses the same Greek word which is here found for the shaking of the reed in the wind. Thus, if any one had thought it possible for the holy Baptist to have had his faith ‘clouded over,’ as modern Protestants speak, he would have his foolish error corrected at once by the first words of our Lord concerning His Precursor. The second thought which our Lord seems to exclude is that of all softness and luxuriousness of life. But it does not

³ Ephes. iv. 14.

⁴ 2 Thess. ii. 2.

seem likely that many of the disciples would have connected such softness with the character of the Baptist. It is therefore better to suppose that our Lord was meaning to insist on the exactly contrary character of the great Preacher whom the people had gone out to see. It is as if He said : ‘ You went out to see a man of great firmness and stability, a man of extreme austerity of life and food and clothing ; for if you had wished for instability, like that of the reeds, you would not have gone so far for that purpose, and if you had wished for softness and effeminacy, you would have looked for them in vain in the dweller in the desert. They that are in costly apparel and live delicately are in the houses of kings. I suppose, therefore, that you went for something very different from this. What went you out to see ? A prophet, you will say. Yes, and more than a prophet.’

Our Lord then proceeds to explain the prerogatives of St. John, which raised him above the rank of the prophets in general. In the first place, he had been himself the subject of prophecy. ‘ For this is he of whom it is written.’ Again, what had been prophesied of him was of a character to raise him above the Prophets, for he had been described as an Angel, a special Messenger of God, not only to predict the coming of the Messias, which was the common office of all the Prophets, but to do more, to prepare His way before Him. This was something more than the office of the Prophets ; this prerogative of his made him the special Precursor of our Lord. Thus among those who had been born of women no one was greater than he, and yet, in the last place, the lesser in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than St. John.

We may now dwell for a moment on each one of these praises or prerogatives of St. John in the mouth of our

Blessed Lord. In the first place, our Lord is speaking, not of the personal character or interior sanctity of St. John, which certainly could not be discerned by the multitudes who went out to see him, but of his office and position in the Providential introduction of the Kingdom of Heaven. That St. John's sanctity was pre-eminent cannot be doubted, and we have spoken elsewhere of the gifts of grace which had been bestowed upon him for the due discharge of his great commission. But our Lord is speaking of his greatness in the place which he occupied in the counsels of God for the Redemption of the world. To this class of greatness belongs the fact that he was himself the subject of prophecy. Not only had he appeared, like the other prophets, at the moment in the sacred history when his work was to be performed, but he had been specially promised by the last of the Prophets before him. Now this is a singular privilege, for in the whole range of Scripture prediction, whether by word or by type, it is our Lord and our Blessed Lady only, besides St. John, who are thus foretold, except indeed that we may consider that the position of St. Joseph in the Kingdom of our Lord was prefigured by that of the Patriarch Joseph in the land of Egypt, as related by the author of the Book of Genesis. We may perhaps find some hints of this kind in Scripture, but the two great figures in prophecy are undoubtedly our Lord and His Blessed Mother. And yet we find a distinct prediction of the mission of St. John Baptist, as has been said.

The second prerogative of St. John, of which our Lord here speaks, is the special object of his mission. He was sent, not simply to predict the coming of our Lord, but to prepare the way before Him. ‘Thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare His way,’ the father of the Baptist had himself sung on the occasion of

his naming and circumcision, ‘to give knowledge of salvation to His people unto the remission of their sins, through the bowels of the mercy of our God, in which the Orient from on high hath visited us. To enlighten them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to direct our feet into the way of peace.’ This involves a great commission, for it has a part of the apostolic office as well as of the prophetic office. And we know how well and faithfully St. John had discharged this part of his commission, and how, as St. Luke goes on to observe, he had actually prepared the way of our Lord in that part of the people who were really to avail themselves of the salvation which he announced. Moreover, he had another office to discharge which may be distinguished from that of simple preparation of the people for our Lord, in that he had marked Him out and borne witness to Him, when He had come.

The next part of our Lord’s witness to the greatness of His Precursor consists in His saying about the children of women, of whom no one had arisen greater than St. John. Here again it must be remembered that our Lord is speaking of his office and position, and is not entering on the subject of the pre-eminent personal sanctity of St. John. ‘Amen I say to you, amongst those that are born of women there hath not arisen a greater Prophet than John the Baptist.’ The phrase, ‘born of women,’ is a common one for all men, and it need not be considered of necessity that our Lord uses it on purpose to exclude Himself, Who was born of a pure Virgin, not in the usual way of human births, or that Blessed Virgin Mother herself, who was born in a different way from all others, by reason of her Immaculate Conception. For it is not our Lord’s way thus to speak of Himself when He makes comparisons of this kind, nor does the pre-eminent grace and position of the

Blessed Mother of God come into consideration in the question between the commission of St. John and that of the other Prophets. It seems natural to think that our Lord is here repeating, in another and a comparative form, what He has already said as to the greatness of the commission given to St. John, for the purpose of afterwards, as we shall see, exalting the commission given to the Gospel preachers and prophets. St. John, on many accounts which have already been named, is one than whom no Prophet is greater, for he was in so peculiar a way the Forerunner of our Lord, the one who prepared the people for Him, the one who pointed Him out, the one who had prophesied, so to say, in his mother's womb, when he leaped for joy at the presence of our Lord and His Blessed Mother. He has a large share even in the Gospel preaching, for his preaching it was that prepared the hearts of men, by penance and confession and baptism, to receive our Lord. In these and other things he has no equal, certainly no superior, in the whole band of great Prophets who have risen up in the history of the chosen people. He stands between the two covenants, as it were, crowning the Old Testament with its very greatest glory, and opening the door for the New Testament. And yet, our Lord adds, He that is the lesser in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than he.'

These last words, which seem to give the chief point and meaning to the former language of our Lord, have been variously interpreted by the great Christian commentators, as it has not been a settled principle among them that our Lord is speaking of the office, rather than of the person of St. John. Thus they have seen in some cases that there is a great difficulty in the two members of the sentence, when taken together, inasmuch as St. John is exalted almost beyond all others in the first

of these members, and yet set beneath the lesser in the Kingdom of Heaven in the second. Thus they have sometimes explained the difficulty by supposing that our Lord speaks of Himself in the second member, as the lesser in the Kingdom of Heaven, because He came after St. John into the world, and before the public eye. St. John himself had said that He that came after him was to be preferred before him. But this mode of explanation does not fully meet the difficulty, for our Lord says, not the lesser simply, but the lesser in the Kingdom of Heaven. The words which presently follow upon these, in the passage of St. Matthew, serve to confirm the supposition that our Lord is here drawing a contrast between the greatest of the Prophets of the Old Law, and the lowest offices of the New Kingdom, and that this is the true explanation of these words about St. John. Great indeed he was, as compared to the very greatest of the old Prophets, and yet he belonged, with them, to the Old, and therefore greatly inferior, Dispensation. And thus it is that his greatness is almost as nothing in comparison to the powers and dignities of the ministers of that New Dispensation, to which indeed he opened the door, but to which he nevertheless did not by his office belong.

It may indeed be said, with great truth, that even before the death of St. John Baptist, the Sacrament of Baptism had been instituted, and many of the Gospel privileges had been conferred on souls. But still this had been done partially and by anticipation, and the whole system of the privileges of the New Kingdom had not been established, nor could it be, until our Lord had died upon the Cross. Thus, to speak of nothing else, St. John was to go, after his martyrdom for the truth, great Saint as he was, not at once to Heaven, because the gates of Heaven were not yet thrown open, even to the dearest

servants of God, but he was to go to the holy place of Limbus; a place, no doubt, in which there were no torments as in Purgatory, but still a place of detention and of exile. Whereas, when the Kingdom of Heaven was once founded, the child of a few minutes old, who had been baptized in the Catholic Church, would fly at once to the possession of God in Heaven, without any detention at all. For in the Catholic Church all her children enter into the possession of the immense spiritual benefits which have been bestowed upon mankind by means of the Incarnation and Passion of the Son of God, and thus they are all God's children and members of the Body of our Lord, and have all a right to the inheritance of the Kingdom of Heaven. Thus our Lord's comparison is rather between the two covenants, than between the person of St. John and the person of any other, and He puts the comparison in the most striking possible light, by taking the very highest of the Prophets, His own Precursor and familiar friend on the one hand, and the least in the Kingdom of Heaven on the other hand. And thus we see there is no question here of the personal sanctity of St. John, which has always been considered in the Church as of very great pre-eminence indeed, but only of the difference between even what is highest under the Law, and what is lowest in the Kingdom of Grace. Nor is it any difficulty that St. John was himself baptized by our Lord, and so made a partaker of the benefits of His Redemption, or that even under the Old Dispensation men could obtain the gift of regeneration, as they could obtain it under the dispensations which had preceded the Law, from the beginning of the world. Because the fulness of the Christian graces was a gift reserved for the Gospel Law. Thus, whatever St. John and others received under the Old Law, or during the time of our Lord's preaching

before the Passion, belonged to the New Dispensation, and thus it was natural, in a contrast between the two Dispensations, to speak as our Lord spoke, even of St. John.

There is another meaning of the words, ‘the Kingdom of Heaven,’ which cannot be shut out from many passages in which the words are used by our Blessed Lord, although it has been foolishly pressed, in an exclusive sense, by some of the Protestant commentators. This meaning of the words signifies the preaching of the Gospel, and it has been said elsewhere in this work that this idea also belongs to the great idea of the Kingdom of Heaven. If this sense be applied in the passage before us, it becomes very easy to see that our Lord’s words convey a very true and important contrast between the powers which are ordinarily wielded by the ministers of the Gospel, in their efforts to propagate the faith and to bring men to God, and those possessed even by great Saints and Prophets before the establishment of the Church. For the Kingdom of Heaven is now propagated by the special powers of the Word of God, which St. Paul calls ‘the foolishness of preaching,’ by the grace of the Holy Ghost working in the heart of the preacher, and then in the heart of his hearers, and by the whole array of marvellous resources for the benefit of souls which is supplied by the sacraments. This short statement does not exhaust the armament, so to speak, of the Christian apostolate, but it is sufficient to indicate this wide subject as furnishing a further explanation of the words of our Lord. And there is good reason, in what follows on the words here related, for considering that our Lord was referring to the powers of the Christian teacher.

‘And from the days of John the Baptist until now, the Kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence, and the violent

bear it away. For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John. And if you will receive it, he is Elias that is to come. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.' The first words of this sentence, which is related in this place by St. Matthew alone, though words very similar indeed occur at a later period of our Lord's teaching in St. Luke, mark the position of St. John in the Divine counsels, both with relation to what had preceded him, and to what came after him. He is placed by our Lord at the end of the Old Dispensation, and at the beginning of the New, and it is made his especial praise that he has given the first impulse and start, if we may so speak, to the general movement of souls eagerly availing themselves of the blessings of the later Dispensation. 'From the days of John the Baptist until now, the Kingdom of Heaven is suffering violence and the violent are bearing it away.' Our Lord's words represent the Kingdom of Heaven as a great treasure which is being violently laid hands on by the people, and being taken away and appropriated by force. Up to that time it was a hidden or promised treasure, something future and out of the reach of the generality of mankind. Now it is as it were thrown open to all, and more than that, a great impulse or wave of grace has taken possession of multitudes, the force of which carries them over all obstacles and risks for the sake of obtaining the prey which lies before them. Now this impulse it is that was the great work of St. John. It was the effect of his preaching of repentance. No one of the Prophets had produced such a movement of souls, though it is probable that they were far more frequently preachers and reformers of manners, in the ordinary sense of the term, than simply foretellers of future events. It is hard to think, for instance, that the prophecy of Jonas at Ninive was simply the announcement of a future chastisement of God on

that city. Our Lord contrasts the repentance of the Ninivites with the coldness and dulness of the Jews to His own teaching, and this seems to imply that there was something analogous in the two teachings. The treatment which the Prophets received at the hands of those to whom they were sent, is most easily explained by supposing that they were severe teachers and denouncers of the prevalent vices and sins of their day. But no one of them had produced a reformation of manners and a revival of religion like that produced by the preaching of St. John, and he, moreover, was the close Forerunner of the King of Grace Himself, and so the movement which he set on foot could be taken up and carried on by the whole power of the Gospel Kingdom. This is the incommunicable praise of St. John. This is the feature in his office on which the prophecies which are applied to him dwell. This is that which is conveyed in the words of the Archangel when the birth of the Baptist was announced to his father, Zachary, and it is that which Zachary himself speaks of in his canticle of rejoicing after that birth had come about. Thus, besides being so great in the dispensation of the Old Law, he is especially great in the part which he had to play in the opening of the New Kingdom.

'For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John,' that is, the Prophets prophesied and the Law reigned, and guided the people to God, up to the time of St. John. He was the end and crown of that great dispensation, of which the Prophets and the Law were the appointed organs. He broke the silence which had fallen on the prophetic choir since the days of the last of the prophets. He began a new and spiritual teaching in decided contrast to the authorized teaching of the Law in the synagogues. His moral teaching was evan-

gelical. We see its purport in the short specimens of which St. Luke has been the recorder in the early chapters of his Gospel. He did not teach with the same authority as our Lord, but his teaching was altogether different in tone from that of the Scribes and Pharisees. He touched the conscience and the heart, and turned men to confession and to penance. The words in which the teaching of our Lord, when it is first spoken of in the Gospels, is summed up, ‘Repent, and believe the Gospel, the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand,’ are identical with the words which summarize the preaching of St. John. In this respect he belonged to the New Dispensation, as in other respects he belonged to the Old. Our Lord’s words, therefore, here recorded, signify that St. John put an end and a crown to the teaching of the Law and the Prophets, the Dispensation in which they represented the doctorate authorized by God, and that from him the new Kingdom began.

‘And if you will receive it, he is Elias that is to come.’ This feature in the office and character of St. John was required in order to fill up the teaching concerning him which our Lord is here giving. The Jews quite understood the prophecy of Malachias, with which the Old Testament prophecies closed, but they did not understand that it had two meanings, one literal, to be fulfilled in the coming of Elias before the end of the world, and the other figurative and spiritual, to be fulfilled in the coming of a Forerunner before the face of our Lord in His first Advent. The words of Malachias were plain, but they spoke unmistakeably of a coming of our Lord in power and judgment. ‘Behold, I will send you Elias the Prophet before the coming of the great and terrible dreadful day of the Lord. And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the

children to their fathers ; lest I come and strike the earth with anathema.' There can be no doubt that these words refer directly to the last Coming of our Lord, and that they will be fulfilled before that event by the coming of Elias in the flesh. But they were commonly understood by the Jewish doctors of the first Advent, and, indeed, we do not know that they made the due distinction between the two Comings of our Lord which are foreshadowed in prophecy generally. There was another prophecy of the same Prophet Malachias, to which our Lord has already referred in the former part of this passage concerning St. John, in which it is said that an Angel or messenger was to be sent to prepare the way before His face, and this prophecy was, as our Lord tells us, directly fulfilled in St. John. Nevertheless, there was a very true sense in which the other prophecy also related to him, and, indeed, it is a general principle with regard to the anticipations of God's great dealings with man, which are vouchsafed to us in Sacred Scripture, that they are in many points identical in their character, and the words in which one is predicted often adapt themselves to another.

Thus it is that the characteristics of the mission of St. John as spoken of by St. Gabriel to Zachary, and by Zachary himself in his canticle, are taken rather from the second prophecy which refers by name to Elias, than from the first prophecy which our Lord tells us refers directly to St. John. For St. Gabriel says to the father of St. John in the Temple, 'He shall go before Him in the spirit and power of Elias, that he may turn the hearts of the fathers unto the children, and the incredulous to the wisdom of the just, to prepare unto the Lord a perfect people.' Thus the mission of St. John was in truth a mission in the spirit and power of Elias,

and in this sense our Lord declares that he is Elias who is to come. And at the same time, St. John himself could truly deny, when he was asked by the Jews, that he was Elias. He was not Elias in person, but he was Elias in spirit and mission, and he went before the face of our Lord, as Elias is to go before the face of our Lord, only his mission was before the first Advent of our Lord, and that of Elias is to be before the second Advent. And perhaps on this account it is that our Lord says, 'If you will receive it,' as if the truth concerning the fulfilment of the prophecies about Elias in the person of St. John, was not a direct truth excluding all other interpretations and fulfilments of the same prophecy, but a fulfilment of that prophecy in a most true but, at the same time, a secondary sense. Thus it was not a truth that could be imposed on the unwilling or forced upon the incapable, while at the same time it was a truth of the utmost importance, both in itself, and also because it would remove a difficulty to the reception of our Blessed Lord Himself, in Whom the prophecies, as commonly understood, would not have been fulfilled unless there had been a coming of Elias before His face. We shall find this very objection afterwards urged by the Apostles themselves at so late a period as the day after the Transfiguration, in which the appearance of Elias in glory had suggested to them the question which our Lord then answered. And again, we now find our Lord for the first time, as far as our record tells us, using His favourite expression to attract the attention of His hearers : 'He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.'

St. Luke subjoins some words as to which it cannot be quite certain whether they are his own or a continuation of the words of our Lord immediately preceding. They refer to the reception of St. John by the various classes of the population to which his

preaching had been addressed. On the one hand, it is not often that this blessed Evangelist allows himself to make remarks on the conduct of the people of whom he speaks. On the other hand, it seems unlikely that these words would have been spoken by our Lord in this place, although He uses words not very different from them, to the Scribes and Pharisees themselves, in the course of His last preaching in Jerusalem, at the beginning of the week of the Passion. At the time of His Ministry to which this passage in the Evangelist belongs, He was not in the habit of openly denouncing the Scribes and Pharisees in the face of the people.

'And all the people hearing, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John, but the Pharisees and the lawyers despised the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized by him.' These words, as has been said, may be understood as the words of St. Luke, commenting on what our Lord had said of the mission of the Baptist. They are an explanation, in the simple historical sense, of what had been said by our Lord about the Kingdom of Heaven suffering violence and the violent bearing it away. The people as a mass had welcomed the teaching and baptism of St. John as a Divine visitation, ordained for their great benefit, and by doing this they had justified God, that is, they had expressed their faith in the truthfulness of God and in His fidelity to His promises, by accepting gladly the means of grace which He had first promised and then provided for them. The words remind us of what St. John the Evangelist relates as said by the blessed Precursor himself, 'That he that received the testimony of our Lord had set his seal to it that God is true,' that is, had practically declared by his act the truthfulness of God. So to close with the providential arrangement by which God

had invited His people to penance by the preaching of St. John, was to bear witness to the justice and goodness of God in more ways than one. It was to testify to the justice of God, in providing a way of salvation for His people. It was to declare that God had not failed in His promises. It was to acknowledge the fulfilment of the prophecies. And in those who came to our Lord after the reception of the baptism of St. John, it was to declare the goodness and faithfulness of God in fulfilling the predictions of St. John himself, about that One greater than he, Who was to come after him and to baptize with the Holy Ghost.

On the other hand, to do as the Pharisees and lawyers had done, that is, to decline to listen to St. John or to be baptized by him, was to reject, and to reject out of contempt, the very way by which God was offering them salvation. It showed the same perversity which is so constantly found in Christians who will, as it were, go to Heaven by a way of their own, instead of closing with the arrangements made by God in the Catholic Church. It can hardly be said that it was a matter of obligation for men to listen to the preaching of St. John and to humble themselves by confession and the reception of the baptism of penance. That is, men could come to our Lord afterwards without these preliminaries, as in fact the great multitudes of the Gentile converts did so. But it was not the less true that the Baptism and teaching of St. John were the counsel of God to the Jews—the plan by which God had designed the way of their salvation, the foundation of their faith on humility and the preparation of their hearts for the coming Kingdom. They turned away in pride, and this pride and the singularity and independence of providential guidance which it involved, left their hearts prepared not simply for the non-reception of our Lord, but

for His rejection. Their spiritual ruin was already predetermined, when they refused to submit thankfully to preparation which God in His loving mercy for them had ordained. They never could explain at once the Divine mission of the blessed Baptist, and their own indifference to that mission. To the very last this stumbling-block remained, and, shortly before His Passion, which they were already contriving, our Lord was to reproach them again for their error.

CHAPTER XV.

The Children in the Market-Place.

St. Matt. xi. 15—19 ; St. Luke vii. 29, 30 ; *Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 53.

THE teaching which our Lord had been led to give, after the departure of the messengers of St. John Baptist, was still further supplemented by Him, and apparently at the same time, by some remarks of the manner in which the men of that generation, as he said, had dealt with Himself and with St. John respectively. What He had already said was sufficient to give the highest possible idea of the dignity and mission of the great Precursor, and also to establish the perfect identity of purpose between Himself and St. John. The relation in which St. John had stood to the teaching of the synagogue, as well as to that of the new Kingdom, had been clearly traced. The last remarks of our Lord, or of St. Luke, on which we have been lately speaking, carry on our thoughts to the reception accorded by various classes of the people to the teaching of St. John, and, implicitly, to their dealing with that of our Lord's also. Our Lord

now speaks of the people generally, without making any distinction between the several portions of the nation. It is not that there was not some difference between the common people and the authorities in this respect, as there had been between the same two portions of the population in the case of St. John. But, on the whole, the reception of our Lord was decided for the nation by the conduct of its rulers, and the people, indeed, followed these only too readily. It is very likely that at this time, when the opposition to our Lord on the part of the authorities had become pronounced and vehement, the people in general were far less favourable to Him than before. Thus it is that the whole people seems to be spoken of in the passage on which we are now to comment, although there was always a considerable part of the nation which had welcomed Him at first and was still faithful to Him.

‘And the Lord said, whereunto then shall I liken the men of this generation? and to whom are they like? It is like to children sitting in the market place, and crying one to another, to their companions, and saying, We have piped to you and you have not danced, we have lamented and you have not wept. For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, He hath a devil. The Son of Man is come, eating and drinking, and you say, Behold a man that is a glutton and a wine-drinker, a friend of publicans and sinners. And wisdom is justified of all her children.’¹

The general sense of our Lord’s image cannot be difficult to discern, because He has given so full an explanation of it in its application to the men of that generation. He clearly means to say, that they were so perverse that nothing would satisfy them, and that they

¹ It is remarked below that the words ‘the Lord said,’ at the beginning of this passage, are not found in all of the best manuscripts.

would find fault with every method adopted in the Providence of God to win them to penitence and faith. God adopted, in His wisdom, a different method with St. John and a different method with our Lord. But the fruit of this condescension and benignity was that each of His messengers was rejected and found fault with. As to the particular meaning of the image in itself, it is not quite easy to follow it. But the difficulty seems to come from that which is, in another sense, a great gain to us, namely, the extreme faithfulness of the Evangelists in relating the words of our Lord, which were spoken in Aramaic, and the force of which was to some extent alien to the Greek in which we possess the Gospels. We have noticed a similar difficulty, arising, as it seems, from the same cause, in the report of the conversation of our Lord with Nicodemus, where He is speaking of the free manner in which the Holy Ghost acts on souls. ‘The Spirit breatheth where He wills, and thou hearest His voice, but thou knowest not whence He cometh, or whither He goeth.’ And then our Lord subjoins, ‘So is every one that is born of the Spirit.’² But He does not mean that every one who is born of the Spirit has this perfect untraceable freedom of action, but only that that is the way in which every act of spiritual regeneration is carried out. ‘So it is whenever any one is born again of the Holy Ghost.’ The same remark may be made as to the beginnings of some of the Parables, where our Lord says the Kingdom of Heaven is like to this or that, meaning that there are features in the character, the propagation, or in the reception, or in the conduct of the Kingdom of Heaven, which are analogous to what He is about to speak of in the parable which follows. Thus in the case before us, the words taken quite literally, in our way of understanding, might seem to mean that the

² St. John iii. 8.

men of that generation, of whom our Lord was speaking, were like the children complaining of their companions for not either dancing or mourning with them. Whereas the explanation given in the application of the image by our Lord, shows us that the complainants, so to speak, are rather Himself and St. John, or God whose Providence sent first one and then the other, than the generation whom they have been unable to move. This is probably the simple explanation of the apparent difficulty.

Theophylact tells us that there was a game among the Jewish children, who divided themselves, in the public places in which they used to play, into two choirs, as it were, one of which represented the joyous processions and songs of a marriage festival, and the other in the same way acted the mourning and lamentations of a funeral. Then these two choirs shouted at each other in reproaches like those spoken of by our Lord, the game consisting in the representation going on simultaneously and discordantly. In this case the children who acted the marriage rejoicings, and the children who acted the funeral lamentations, would be different sets, and would reproach each other at the same time. This explanation might suffice, if we could be quite certain that this game was really played. Theophylact is a late writer for such a point. Another interpretation of the passage is that which supposes the same kind of division among the children, but that they represent, not our Lord and St. John, but the men of that generation, who had their own ways of living, some very austere and others very laxly, and that the austere set complained of our Lord for not living as they did, and the lax set took offence at St. John for not sharing their laxity. In this way the accuracy of the words as they stand in the Greek text is more fully preserved than

in the other. It may be noticed, however, that our Lord does not speak of children playing in the market-place, but of children sitting still, as if they would not join their companions in their game, as if they could not agree among themselves whether it was to be rejoicing and piping, or mourning and lamentation, and so would do neither, instead of doing either of the two in union. But in any case, as has been said, the application of the image by our Lord is clear.

'For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say he hath a devil,' that is, he came in the way of great penance and austerity, and he had a right at your hands to all the respect and veneration which are usually bestowed on men of such a character, who have conquered themselves and their appetites and speak to you in the Name of God. But your perversity was such, that you evaded the authority of this great messenger by saying he had a devil. The accusation of having a devil is nowhere actually related as having been made against St. John, but the words of our Lord are a sufficient authority for the fact. Such an accusation seems to have been the common way of getting rid of the influence of any one whose manners were at all extraordinary, and it was very much the same thing in the mouths of the Jews as a charge of madness. It is mentioned at a later period of our Lord's own teaching, that they said even to Him, 'Say we not well that Thou art a Samaritan and hast a devil?' But this may perhaps refer to the more heinous charge which they made against our Lord, of casting out devils by collusion with the prince of the devils. There was nothing in the spotless and beautiful character of St. John on which malice and calumny could fasten, and it only remained to his enemies to invent the preposterous charge that he was under demoniacal influence.

The charge probably fastened on the great austerity and solitude of his life in the desert, apart from the dwellings of men and the common paths of life. His example may have seemed impossible to follow, nor did he, as we see from the specimens of his teaching which remain to us, enjoin on those who sought his advice that they should think of following it. The marvellous sanctity of his life and the force of his preaching they could not deny, and so it only remained to detract from his personal merit, in order to avoid the acceptance of his doctrine and of his witness to our Lord.

But, if they objected to the austeries of St. John, how had they dealt with the very different manners of our Lord? Our Lord had from the first adopted the system of mixing freely with men of all classes and conditions, and in order to do this, it was almost a necessity for Him to appear outwardly to live like the rest of men. He had fasted for forty days and forty nights, and we do not read of any excessive rigour of fasting, to this extent, in the life of St. John. No doubt his ordinary fare was such as to make his life a perpetual fast, in the ecclesiastical sense of the term, but, even in this, he did not probably go beyond the customary rules of our Lord when He was in retirement and not among the crowds of men. It is not likely that the common life in the holy house at Nazareth was anything but one of very great austerity, but there was no outward sign of this in the intercourse of our Lord with men. He came, as He says here, eating and drinking. He did not refuse to be present at the marriage feast, indeed He made the marriage feast the occasion of the first, and one of the greatest, of His miracles. He had accepted the invitation of the joyous publican Matthew, after He had vouchsafed to call him to the high grace of the apostolate. No doubt there were other occasions of the same.

sort, and one or two such acts, on our Lord's part, would be noticed and would furnish matter for criticism, especially as time went on, and He became more and more an object of suspicion, and even hatred, to the ecclesiastical rulers and the stricter portion of the religious society of the day. And so it came to pass that the immaculate innocence of Jesus Christ was made the butt at which shafts of scorn were directed, as if He had been a man of lax life and of low companionship. Over and over again has the example of our Lord been imitated by the greatest of His saints, those especially who have had the most purely apostolic vocations, and they have almost scandalized their friends by their extreme familiarity and condescension even to notorious sinners, going into their houses even when the partners of their sin were present there, and waiting for the moment of grace to strike at last the blow which was to set free from their bonds the poor slaves of passion and lust. ‘The Son of Man is come eating and drinking, and you say, Behold a man that is a glutton and a wine-drinker, a friend of publicans and sinners.’

The doctrine contained in this passage of the Evangelists is twofold. In the first place, it is clear that the different methods pursued by St. John and by our Blessed Lord were deliberately and most mercifully chosen by God, for the purpose of meeting different needs and gaining the attention and affection of different orders in the community. They were diametrically opposed in outward appearance, and yet each method was divinely adapted to meet the end in view. Thus we have here the plainest sanction for the various ways in which the Church and the Saints of God have addressed themselves to different classes or nations or generations, carefully studying the characteristic features and the dominant ideas and traditions of each, in order to

present to them the Gospel truth in a form as little likely as possible to offend them or to scare them. The Church has often been taunted by her adversaries with this versatility, as if it involved a sacrifice of truth or of principle, and yet her teaching is plainly only a continuation of the same Divine method which our Lord speaks of as having been adopted by St. John and by Himself.

No one, certainly, ever knew so well as our Lord the value of the human soul, or its extreme weakness and readiness to fly off from the teachers of the truth, when they present themselves in a garb or guise which in any way ruffles its prejudices. It is because the Church has inherited from our Lord something of His own tenderness for souls, and something also of His considerate prudence in approaching them with the holy but severe truths of the faith and the law of God, that she also has condescended so much and so frequently to humour their prejudices, and to win them in the only way in which they are to be won. She has not considered her own habitual ways so important as the duty of gaining men to God. From the very first we find this method of hers made into a principle by St. Paul and the other Apostles. The first occasion for its use arose with the pressing of the Gentiles into the Church. There at once it became necessary at the same time to conciliate Jewish traditions, and even prejudices, by reverencing the law and all that belonged to the old system, which was to be superseded by the new, and yet not the less to show that the obligations to be imposed on Gentile converts were as slight as possible, and that their liberty was as dear to the Apostles as the traditions in which they had themselves been brought up. The whole history of St. Paul is full of the exercise of this wise versatility. He could eat with the Gentiles and

allow his Christians at Corinth to go to the banquets of their Pagan fellow-townsmen, without asking questions as to the meats set before them, and he could go to the Temple at Jerusalem and offer the oblation usual in the case of those who had a vow upon them. It would be superfluous to point out how this principle has been acted on in the later Church. It may sometimes have seemed even to be urged too far in concessions to the traditions of heathen nations, for the sake of converting their members to God, but, even if this were perfectly well established as a fact, it would only result that individual zeal may sometimes make mistakes as to the application of what is in itself a most holy rule.

On the other hand it is clear, in the second place, that whatever way the Church may adopt for the great end of gaining souls to God, it is quite certain that she will never escape the criticism of the world, and especially of the false religionists by whom she is so carefully and maliciously watched. The contradictory cavils of which our Lord here complains are repeated over and over again in the history of the propagation of His religion. A long catalogue might be made of these criticisms, fastening, as in the case of our Lord and His great Forerunner, on points which contradict each other. The root of the evil lies in the corrupt heart of man, any dominant passion in which, if indulged, is enough to set it against the truth and the severity of God's law. Self love, pride, sloth, a tendency even to the more refined shades of sensuality, which are by no means the least mischievous, envy, jealousy, anger, covetousness, in short, any of the many passions, subtle or gross, to which our nature is liable, can create in the heart an instinctive repugnance to the truth. For the truth is always an appeal to conscience, and it always awakens the self-reproaches which may have been stifled, and

which require some external call to arouse their vigour. And, when persons thus appealed to cannot find fault with the truth itself that is presented to them, they are driven, almost of necessity, to object to the manner in which, or the instruments by whom, it is so presented. Then again, people under these influences, all who do not live in the light of God's presence and in the practice of self-examination and self-discipline, are wonderfully prone to exercise the critical faculties with which they are endowed on the lives of others, and also on the conduct of those above them, not excepting the Providential arrangements by which God seeks to reclaim them to a better life. It is as our Lord said to Nicodemus, 'Every one that doth evil hateth the light and cometh not to the light, that his works may not be reproved.' And when the light is brought to him against his will, he is ever ready to misunderstand it or to make out that it is darkness. And the ways of God are not as ours, nor His thoughts as our thoughts, and thus it is easy for the unregenerate soul to find excuses for its credulity in some supposed flaw in the conduct of the messengers of God, and in the institutions which He has devised for the benefit of souls.

The words with which our Lord concludes this discourse are plainly a sort of commentary on those previous words which occur just before the passage on which we are commenting in the Gospel of St. Luke. That Evangelist, as we have seen, has added to the praise of St. John Baptist, in our Lord's words to the crowd after the departure of the messengers of the holy Precursor, some words which may either have been spoken by our Lord, or convey the comment of the Evangelist himself on the treatment of our Lord and St. John, respectively, by the Jews and their rulers. The great reason for considering them as the words of the Evan-

gelist, is that, in the ordinary text which is followed by the Vulgate version, St. Luke begins afresh after these words, saying, ‘and the Lord said,’ and the rest, going on to relate the words about the children in the market-place. But it is so unusual for St. Luke to insert anything as a remark of his own, that many have hesitated to consider it as certain that the words in question are not the words of our Lord Himself. The prefatory clause with which the remarks about the children in the market-place are introduced is not found in several of the best manuscripts. It is at all events most natural to consider the former words, whether of St. Luke, or of our Blessed Lord Himself, as receiving their best commentary from those on which we have now to speak.

‘And wisdom is justified by all her children.’ Just before, as has been said, our Lord had said, if the words are indeed His and not those of the Evangelist: ‘And all the people hearing, and the publicans justified God, being baptized with John’s baptism. But the Pharisees and the lawyers despised the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized by him.’ It is natural to think that the sense of the word to ‘justify’ is the same in each of these places. The word to ‘justify,’ has a scriptural sense which it has not in the classical Greek. It means, in Sacred Scripture, to consider or declare just and wise and holy. Our Lord then says, that in contrast to the captious critics whom nothing could satisfy or please, all those who were truly children of the Divine Wisdom, that is, faithful and simple and docile hearts, not led astray or forced to find difficulties in every thing by their own perversity, saw that the counsel of God, whether in the austere preaching of the Baptist or in the affable and winning manner in which our Lord addressed Himself to the people, was wise and holy and convenient and irreproachable. They justified the wisdom

of God, first in their own hearts and minds and judgments, and then in their practical adhesion to the method employed for the conversion of the people, by being themselves first disciples of the Baptist and recipients of his baptism and then disciples in the school of our Lord. Instead of making void, or setting at nought, the counsel of God for their own welfare, they gladly closed with it, and thus reaped the benefit of the designs of God. For it was intended in the Divine counsels, as is often said of the baptism of St. John, that it should prepare the hearts and minds of the nation for the reception of Jesus Christ. They got the blessing of the penance which was taught and insisted on by St. John, and they got the benefit also of the fuller light and consolation, and the abundant graces of the Gospel as preached by our Lord. Both things worked for good to them, because they were simple and humble, not taking offence at the invitation to penance, and so not biassed by their own pride and evil conscience against the claims and authority of our Lord. And their reception of the Gospel message, and of the graces of the new Kingdom was the justification of the wisdom of God, in adopting that method for their conversion. For God never lets His word go forth and remain unfruitful, and when men gladly and gratefully cooperate with the means of salvation which He addresses to them, they give their witness that those means are such as to gain their end, with those whose hearts are not wilfully closed against them.

CHAPTER XVI.

Corozain and Bethsaida.

St. Matt. xi. 20—24; *Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 54.

ST. MATTHEW places at the point of the history which we have now reached, some striking words of our Lord concerning the cities in which He had been preaching and working miracles, which are repeated at a later period of time by St. Luke.¹ The words are nearly, though not quite, identical in both Evangelists, and we have to choose between the conclusion that they were only once said by our Lord, in which case they would be out of the order of time, either in St. Matthew or in St. Luke, or that they were said by our Lord more than once, on occasions not quite identical though very similar indeed, and both of which would very naturally have suggested them. It is natural to think that this last supposition is in itself more probable than the other, and it is also entirely in harmony with the principles as to the arrangement of the Gospel narratives which are followed in this work, and which have been sufficiently explained in the introductory volume. It is this view, therefore, of the question as to the difference of the two occasions on which these words occur, which will now be followed.

It is very natural indeed that our Lord should have passed from the reflections which He had made on the various cavils to which He Himself on the one hand,

¹ St. Luke x. 3.

and the blessed Baptist on the other, had been subjected by the malignant enmity with which certain classes of the holy nation had received them, to the consideration of the immense responsibility which had been incurred by those among whom His voice had been so often lifted up in vain, notwithstanding the manifold confirmation of His teaching which His Father had arranged for Him. He was now adopting a new method, to some extent, in His manner of addressing Himself to the people, for He was no longer to be seen in the places where His enemies were so watchful to hinder His preaching by their calumnies, and even by their plots against His life. He was soon to begin a more reserved method of teaching than before, for we are now on the eve of the change which He made when He began the more exclusive use of the system of parabolic teaching. Before long He would leave that part of the country, in which He had hitherto preached almost exclusively, and His former haunts would see Him no more, or only for a few days or hours at a time. The time had not been long, either for the ministry of St. John Baptist, or for His own. He was only now well advanced in His second year of Galilean teaching, and St. John's ministry, with all its great results, had not lasted many months. And yet within that short time, in both cases, a great probation had been going on. Men had been showing, as blessed Simeon said to our Lady at her Purification, 'the thoughts of their hearts,' showing what was in them, by their treatment of the wonderful graces offered to them, first by the preaching of St. John, and then by the whole Ministry of our Lord Himself. And now, within that short time, the sentence was being prepared which was to be executed in the Day of Judgment.

'Then began He to upbraid the cities wherein were done the most of His miracles, for that they had not

done penance. Wo to thee, Corozain! wo to thee, Bethsaida! for if in Tyre and Sidon had been wrought the miracles that have been wrought in you, they had long ago done penance in sackcloth and ashes. But I say to you, it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the Day of Judgment than for you. And thou, Capharnaum, shalt thou be exalted to Heaven? thou shalt go down even unto Hell. For if in Sodom had been wrought the miracles that have been wrought in thee, perhaps it had remained unto this day. But I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for Sodom in the Day of Judgment than for thee.'

It is very remarkable, in the first place, that the cities which are here named by our Blessed Lord are not those which stand out in the Gospel narrative as the scenes of His chiefest miracles. So far is this from being the case, that we do not even know when He was in Corozain or Bethsaida. Of Capharnaum, of course, we know a great deal more, but of the others here mentioned we know nothing. It is a fresh proof of the great accuracy of the Evangelists, in recording the words of their Divine Master, that they should insert these denunciations without any explanation. It is quite easy for us to see that, as we have so very partial, or at the best, so very general, an account of the greater part of our Lord's preaching, that is, of His missionary circuits, it is just what might have been expected, that we should fail to know anything in detail, even about the most conspicuous of His wonderful works in the course of those circuits. The words of our Lord would be perfectly intelligible and natural to his companions, and it is not certain that they were addressed to the multitudes. They would awaken in Peter, or John, or Andrew, memories of beautiful and marvellous exertions of His miraculous powers, which in their minds might

have outshone such wonders as the healing of the leper or of the Centurion's servant, the miracles at Capharnaum, or the casting out of the legion of devils, or even the raising of the widow's son. All these miracles are lost to us, and the very names of the cities which our Lord has here selected for special reprobation, as having been most highly favoured by Him, and as having returned His merciful condescension with the coldest ingratitude, are to us names and nothing more. The curse of oblivion has fallen upon them, and at the Day of Judgment we shall see the chastisement inflicted on their inhabitants, for having been blind and deaf to the teaching and miracles of the Son of God, during the few months which contained His Ministry among them.

Another truth which stands out in prominence from this passage, is the extreme danger of those who are offered the great blessings of grace and who turn away from them. The populations of whom our Lord is now speaking were not actuated towards Him by that jealous hatred which burnt in the hearts of the ecclesiastical rulers of Jerusalem. There must have been some faithful souls among them, for it is unlikely that our Lord would work great miracles where there were none such. The fault of these people was not so much hostility to our Lord and to His teaching, as indifference and dulness. They did not lay traps for His life, or seek to entangle Him in His speech that they might have some grounds of accusation against Him, but they turned a deaf ear to His words and shut their hearts against the persuasive influence of His actions and the convincing force of His miracles. They were not so much like the modern persecutors of the Church, as like the men who live with her system all around them, and yet utterly ignore her claims on their allegiance, even when enforced, as they often are enforced, by men

of singular sanctity, and even by the witness which miracles bear to the note of sanctity in her. This is the case with one member of the comparison, which is suggested by the words of our Lord. The other member of that comparison is made up of the men of Sodom, Tyre, and Sidon, that is, of a heathen population, sunk in the lowest moral degradation, a population famous for little, except for commercial activity, and for some of the most foul superstitions that were to be found even in the corrupt Eastern world. Greece and Rome were low enough in the scale of morality, as compared to the Jews or as measured by the Christian standard, but Greece and Rome were pure in comparison to Tyre and Sidon. And yet of such a population our Lord has said that it would have done penance long before in sackcloth and ashes, if it had witnessed the miracles from which the people of Corozain and Bethsaida had turned away.

And it is the same with the second part of the passage of which we are now speaking. In that part the comparison is between our Lord's own city, as it had come to be called, between Capharnaum, the home of the Apostles, of Matthew as well as of Jairus, of the good Centurion, and of others like him, who had rejoiced the Heart of our Lord by their ready faith, and on the other hand, the city whose name is a synonym for all that is most foul and unnatural in the way of lust, for the greatest degradation of which our poor nature seems capable. And our Lord says that it shall be more tolerable for Sodom in the Day of Judgment than for Capharnaum. Sodom would have been spared if there had been ten just men within its walls. Capharnaum is not to be spared the severest judgment, though it must have had within its walls far more than ten just and faithful men. It is true that the two judgments are very

different. One is the temporal and visible judgment of God upon a great public and common sin, on which He was desirous of setting the conspicuous brand of His anger by a destruction and desolation of which the whole world is witness. The other is the last great day of account, when human sins are to be allotted each their own proper and due chastisement for ever. But the point of the contrast drawn by our Lord lies in the extreme guiltiness which He attributes to such sins as the rejection of Divine evidence to the truth of religion, to His own claims as attested by God, and to the claims of His Church.

Our Lord, then, seems here to tell us that the temper of indifference and contempt for the Christian and Catholic proofs, is a worse evil than the foulest sensuality, even when it goes beyond the promptings of natural lust. He seems to say that it is more difficult to convert a proud, cold, self-satisfied indifferentist, than to convert a Sidonian or a Sodomite. And He seems also to say that God will hereafter chastise more severely such sins as heedlessness to opportunities, neglect of grace offered to us, and, above all, the heretical contempt of the evidences of the Church, than He will punish the gross sins of men who have wallowed in every depth of vice and degraded themselves below the animals. This doctrine certainly throws a new and ghastly light on the sins of the intelligence and of the perverse will, refusing to believe. It shows us how sins that are commonly considered only omissions of duty, are often worse, in the sight of God, than the indulgence of the lower passions. It explains to us the extreme severity, as it seems to our eyes, of the language of the Saints of God about heresy and schism, sins which practically consist in the rejection of the claims of the Church, as attested by the notes by which God is pleased to dis-

tinguish her from all the brood of false sects around her. There are men who think that they know much about the Fathers and Christian antiquity, and who approach very nearly in many details to the practice of Catholic communities, and who yet persist in turning away from the duty of considering their ecclesiastical position with reference either to schism or heresy. This one great fundamental question they even boast of neglecting altogether, and they use all their influence with others to make them also neglect it. It is difficult to see what excuse can be made in such cases, which could not have been made for the inhabitants of Corozain and Bethsaida.

But it would be to show little reverence to these Divine denunciations, to limit our reflections upon them to thoughts of the unhappy lot of these poor inhabitants of cities of which no vestige now remains, or of the sad condition of those outside the Church, who turn away from her evidences. The dwellers in Corozain and Bethsaida were in their day, or rather during the few months of our Blessed Lord's Ministry in Galilee, the possessors of unexampled privileges which were soon withdrawn from them. If the judgment of God was to be so severe against them, how will it be with those who live all their lives in the permanent possession of spiritual advantages, more precious to the faithful soul than the witnessing even of great miracles, and who nevertheless do not use these advantages for the end for which God has bestowed them? The principle on which God acts in these terrible chastisements is the ordinary rule of His justice, which requires the most accurate correspondence to any special graces which He bestows, either on communities or on individuals, and Who most strictly exacts an account of the use of such blessings, an account which issues in dreadful punishment for those who have despised them.

This principle is founded on the truth of the immense value of Divine grace, and of the infinite condescension of God in vouchsafing to interfere, as He does, with the ordinary laws or conditions of His Kingdom for the sake of revealing Himself more fully to His creatures, and of furnishing them with grounds for belief in the messengers to whom He entrusts His dispensation of mercy. We have this principle and this truth insisted upon frequently by our Lord Himself in His parables, so many of which contain the warning of the extreme danger of the neglect of a Divine invitation. In proportion to the dignity of the truths which are revealed in any particular case, and of the persons to whom the message or revelation is entrusted, is the guilt of those who do not attend to the summons, and the punishment of their disrespect to Him Who sent them. Such persons are always spoken of by our Lord as if there were no hope for them in the future, as if the grace which they have passed by would not return. Thus also St. Paul, in his Epistle to the Hebrews, insists most strongly on the danger of falling off after having been once enlightened. ‘Looking diligently,’ he says, ‘lest any one be wanting to the grace of God.’² He mentions the case of Esau, who sold his birthright, and who afterwards, when he desired to inherit the benediction, was rejected, finding no place of present change, though with tears he sought it. And then he reminds them that they are not come to a mountain which might be touched and a burning fire, and the other circumstances or adjuncts which made the scene on Mount Sinai so terrible. ‘But you are come to Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the Heavenly Jerusalem, and to the company of many thousands of Angels, and to the Church of the First-born, who are written in the heavens, and to God the

² Heb. xii. 15.

Judge of all, and to the spirits of the just made perfect, and to Jesus the Mediator of the New Testament, and to the sprinkling of Blood that speaketh better than that of Abel.' And after this grand accumulation of witnesses, he adds : ' See that you refuse Him not that speaketh. For if they escaped not that refused Him that spake on earth, much more shall not we, that turn away from Him that speaketh unto us from the heavens.'³

CHAPTER XVII.

Rejoicing of the Sacred Heart.

St. Matt. xi. 22—30; *Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 54.

AFTER the passage in which he has related the upbraidings addressed by our Lord to the cities which had been the scene of His most marvellous miracles, St. Matthew inserts another passage which naturally supplements the former, in which he tells us of the rejoicing of our Lord, and the words in which that rejoicing was expressed. This beautiful incident in the Life of our Lord seems naturally to follow on the severe language in which He had been obliged to speak of the coldness and obstinacy with which those whom He had favoured so much received the evidence of His Divine Mission. But it was not always so. The great work of the Incarnation, for the redemption and elevation of the human race, has been received with miserable ingratitude by the larger portion of that race which were represented by the impenitent populations of Corozain, Bethsaida, and Capharnaum. But it has not been wrought by God in

³ Heb. xii. 25.

vain, nor have His designs been defeated by the malice of the devils or the hardness of the human heart. On the contrary, the work of the Public Life, which seemed to end in failure, and which was rejected by the very nation which He called His own, was nevertheless most successful and consoling in the eyes of our Lord Himself. He rejoiced in spirit, and His tender Heart had always an immense fund of inextinguishable joy, resting in thought on the countless souls who closed with His gracious offers, and to whom the merits of His Passion were to be abundantly applied. This view of the facts is necessary, as has been said, as a complement of the other, and thus it is quite in accordance with the principle which guided the first Evangelist in the arrangement of his work, that the passage on which we are about to comment should be placed by him where it has been placed.

The question may be raised, whether it is here in its exact place in the order of our Lord's Life, as the similar question has been raised with regard to the passage immediately preceding it. But it seems almost certain that both passages are in their right place in each of the Gospels in which they occur, though in St. Luke the words belong to a later portion of the Life of our Lord.¹ They belong to that class of the utterances of our Lord which He was almost certain to repeat more than once. The miserable punishment of those who witnessed in vain His miracles, and on whom His teaching by example and word fell without effect, was being incurred almost daily, by different persons, as He passed from one part of the Holy Land to another. And in the same way, His Sacred Heart was always finding its consolation and joy in the simple and humble souls who corresponded to His grace. It is clear that a great part of the Gospel

¹ St. Luke x. 21.

of St. Luke is, as we have so often had to say in these volumes, the record of a course of preaching of our Lord which had been passed over by the earlier Evangelists, and the scene of which was, in the main, the country parts of Judea, properly so called, instead of Galilee. It is in this part of the Gospel of St. Luke that we find these occasional repetitions, which have been so often misunderstood by commentators, as if the passages of St. Luke were merely the records of incidents which had already been recorded in their proper places by St. Matthew and St. Mark. On the contrary, the true view of these passages is that St. Luke chooses deliberately to put on record incidents which happened in that, the second great portion of our Lord's public preaching, which were similar to incidents which had also occurred during the first portion of that preaching on which we are now occupied; thus showing us, in truth, that the reception which our Lord had met with in Galilee was practically repeated when He came to pass into the southern portion of the Holy Land. It cannot be considered unlikely that when our Lord found the same spirit in the second part of His preaching which had met Him in the first part, He should complain in the same words which He had already used in Galilee, and that, on the other hand, He should express also in Judea that joy of His Heart, and that thanksgiving to His Father, which is here mentioned by St. Matthew as belonging to the period of the Galilean preaching. This seems to be the simple explanation of the apparent difficulty, and it is quite sufficient to justify the arrangement of the several passages which has been followed in the text.

'At that time Jesus answered and said, I confess to Thee, Father, Lord of Heaven and Earth, because Thou hid these things from the wise and prudent, and

hast revealed them to little ones. Yea, Father, for so hath it seemed good in Thy sight.' The word which is here rendered by the English verb 'confess,' means, in the Greek, acknowledgment, approval, thanksgiving, and even a sort of ratification and praise. All these affections seem to be required to make up the full meaning of what was in the Sacred Heart when these words were uttered. It is almost as if He had said, 'I see how it is, I mark the working of Thy hand and of Thy wisdom, I delight in it, I give Thee thanks for it, I am content and more than content with it, I praise it, I concur in it, I bless Thee for it, I would not have it otherwise, and it is all this to Me because it is Thy choice and Thy work.' There is no disappointment, then, in the Heart of our Lord. He grieves over those who are unfaithful, for they are bringing down on themselves judgments, to which the chastisements of Sodom and Gomorrah are but as nothing. But He adores the justice and the wisdom of the Providence of His Father, Who has willed that so it should be—that His portion of mankind should be those whom He calls little ones.

Every word in this loving prayer of acknowledgment has its deep meaning, and seems to be chosen for purposes some of which can be traced by us. He calls God His Father, and at the same time Lord, for He speaks as the Incarnate Son of God, the Redeemer of the human race, in His Human Nature, the subject and the servant of His Father. But He speaks also in His Divine Person, possessing the fulness of the Divine Nature in common with the Father and the Holy Ghost, and thus there is a tone of authority and of equality with His Father in the words which He uses. They would sound too great in the mouth of one of the saints. And our Lord calls His Father Lord of Heaven and Earth, words which express in the Scriptural way the

universal dominion and sovereignty of God over all His creatures. Moreover, it is quite open to us to see in the words, ‘Lord of Heaven and Earth,’ a reference to that law of God’s government which had been put into execution, not only on earth but in Heaven itself, that law of which His Blessed Mother’s Heart was full when in her *Magnificat* she broke out into the praise of God ‘Who hath put down from their seat the mighty, and hath exalted the humble.’ This law came into operation when men were exalted into the place of the fallen angels, but it was also exemplified in Heaven itself when the proud angels, Lucifer and his followers, were cast out, and the humble Michael and those who followed him in his humility, were exalted to the highest seats in the Kingdom of God. Thus it is the Lord of Heaven and Earth, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who has enacted this law, of which the different issues of the Gospel teaching in different souls is a further exemplification. What has been done in Heaven and on earth already, what will be done in both until the end of time, that is the Law as to which our Lord now expressed His joy and thankfulness, for its working as applied to the various classes of men whom He has before His mind.

‘Because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them to little ones.’ These words contain the matter for which our Lord rejoices and gives thanks. The Father, the Lord of Heaven and Earth, has hid these things from the wise and prudent, and has revealed them to little ones. What are the things of which our Lord speaks as hidden to some and revealed to others? It seems impossible that they can be any other things than those of which He has lately been speaking. He has been speaking in this place of the rejection of the evidences of His Divine Mission, as attested by miracles, which nevertheless had

been unproductive, in certain classes of the community, of that repentance which was necessary as a preliminary to faith. The whole Gospel message is contained in these things, the mysteries of the Kingdom, as He says elsewhere, the truth that God has sent His Son into the world to redeem it, that Light has come into the world, that the Kingdom of Heaven is among them. These things have been hidden from the wise and prudent, the men of learning and the men of practical action and of acquaintance with the world. Our Lord calls them by the name they would give themselves, the name by which they went in the estimation of the world, as in the same way He told them that He had not come to call the just to repentance. They were neither truly wise and prudent, nor truly just, but such was the common opinion concerning them, and their own opinion. Nor were those whom He calls little ones really such in comparison to the others. For they were indeed greater, and of higher stature, than the former in the sight of God, though not in their own.

The persons of whom our Lord is speaking as the wise and prudent were principally the Scribes and Pharisees, and all those who shared their pride and obstinacy, or who followed their guidance. The persons of whom He speaks as the little ones are, on the other hand, His disciples in the largest sense of the term, in which it includes all those who in any way, and to any extent, gave in their adhesion to His teaching. And He thanks His Father and rejoices in spirit because God has hidden the truths concerning Him from the one and revealed them to the other. These words may be understood in two ways. In one sense they signify that our Lord rejoices and gives thanks because, the proud and wise being rejected, God had revealed these things to the little ones; in which case the cause of joy and

thankfulness is mainly the revelation to the little ones, and only incidentally the concealment of the mysteries of the Kingdom from the wise. In this sense our Lord does not directly rejoice over the rejection of those from whom the Divine truths are concealed, but only in the revelation to others in their place. Or the words may be taken to mean that He rejoices in both acts of the Divine Providence alike, in the act of justice, whereby the wise and prudent were left unenlightened, and the act of mercy whereby the secrets of the Kingdom had been revealed to little ones.

In each and both of these divisions of Divine Providence there was something whereby the glory of His Father was enhanced. There is always matter for praise when any great attribute of God is made more clear. In the case of the wise and prudent, God most justly denied to them the extraordinary grace whereby they might, even yet, have been brought to believe, because He saw the hardness of their heart and the obduracy of their will, which made them unfit to receive so great a grace. They had received and abused many graces, and God acted justly in refusing them more. In this case then His justice was displayed. In the case of the little ones, although they had not, like the others, abused the graces they had received, still they had no right or claim, as of justice, on the graces which would enable them to believe, and thus the bestowal of the graces was an act of the mercy of God. Thus St. Paul, in the great passage in which he speaks of the reprobation of the Jews and the election of the Gentiles, acts of justice and of mercy respectively, which correspond exactly to the rejection of the wise, and the choice of the little ones, in the lifetime of our Lord, breaks out, 'See then the goodness and the severity of God. Towards them indeed that are fallen, severity, but towards thee, the goodness

of God, if thou abide in goodness, otherwise thou shalt be cut off.'² And we learn from the same Apostle, to remember that it is not alone the justice and the mercy of God that are made manifest in this Gospel of His Providence, but also His wonderful wisdom, as He breaks out again at the end of that discussion about the Jews and Gentiles, 'Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God ! How incomprehensible are His judgments, and how unsearchable are His ways. For who hath known the mind of the Lord, or who hath been His counsellor ? Or who hath first given to Him, and recompense shall be made him ? For of Him, and by Him, and in Him, are all things, to Him be glory for ever, Amen.'³

Moreover, it was a matter of thanksgiving to our Lord when God took His part against His enemies, as well as when He favoured by His grace those who were His friends. And the Heart of our Lord could not but be grateful for the one as well as for the other. Moses had said in the name of God, when he had predicted the advent of our Lord as the Prophet like unto himself, that incredulity to the preaching of that Prophet would be avenged by God, 'And He that will not hear His words, which He shall speak in My Name, I will be the Revenger.'⁴ Our Lord said to the Pharisees Himself, 'If you believe not that I am He, you shall die in your sins.'⁵ The judicial blindness which God permitted to overwhelm them was an act of vengeance on His part, vindicating the injuries which they had lavished on His Son, sent into the world to redeem them and enlighten them. The simple faith of the little ones was an act of grace on the part of God to them, of blessing on the work of His Son, and of consolation to His Sacred Heart. Thus in each case there was a benefit, for which

² Rom. xi. 2. ³ Rom. xi. 33. ⁴ Deut. xiii. 19. ⁵ St. John viii. 24.

our Lord could rejoice and make thanksgiving—not that He loved vengeance, or desired the punishment of His enemies, but that He could thank God for the love to Himself, and the care for His Name and for His glory, which the act of justice involved. And in the case of the enlightenment of the little ones, that was an act whereby He was singularly glorified and consoled, and so again He could rejoice and give thanks for it to His Father. In this sense, then, the words of the passage before us have their fullest and most instructive meaning.

‘Yea, Father, for so it hath seemed good in Thy sight.’ That is, as it seems, our Lord passes by the justice, and the avenging of His Name and the vindication of His Mission, He passes by even the great consolation of the Redeemer of mankind in the possession of the simple and humble souls whom God had given Him, and He rests His joy above all on the will and choice of His Father in making this arrangement of His Providence. For He came not to do His own will, but the will of Him Who sent Him. He always did the thing that pleased Him, and whatever pleased the Father, that was His delight. Dearly as He loved the souls of men, He did not love them more than the will of His Father, and He loved them because it was the will of His Father that He should love them. And whenever a heart that has any of the true fire of charity in it, contemplates the twofold issues which are of necessity to come, some in one way and others in another way, from the offering of the magnificent bounties of God to creatures whose wills are free, and who are thus left to make their choice between Heaven and Hell, God and His enemies, there must be this single love of the will of God above all things, to give true peace to that heart. The angels who tend the children of men, do all their loving services to us for the love which they bear to

God, and to us for the sake of God, and when their charges win Heaven or when they fail of their great enterprise, they are alike happy, because they love only the will of God. ‘Yea, Father, for so it hath seemed good in Thy sight.’ And there is the same peace and tranquil rejoicing in the hearts of apostolic men, even when they see their efforts defeated, and the objects of their care led astray. They do not rejoice in the evil which sinners bring upon themselves, but they rejoice in the working out of the glorious and most loving counsels of God, whether in the way of mercy or in the way of justice.

And thus it must be remembered that, after all, the rejoicing of the Sacred Heart of our Lord, and the rejoicings of the blessed angels and of the saints, are grounded indeed upon the glory to God which results when the proud are rejected and the humble are chosen, and yet still more, as is clear from these words, upon the knowledge that all this has come about in consequence of the free choice and decree of God. It is the will of the Father, the good will, the good pleasure, as it is variously termed in Sacred Scripture, with which the hearts that are most devoted to Him are most closely united, and, more than all other hearts, the Heart of the Incarnate Son. The whole of the Providential government of the world is an exercise of the free choice of God of which the same Scriptures are full, and in which He displays His wisdom, His power, His condescension, His tender compassion, as well as His holiness and His justice. But the issues of this choice present themselves to the saints, and all who can read them aright, as the decisions of His adorable will, whether they bear externally the character of prosperity or adversity, failure or success, subjects of natural mourning or natural joy. The display of His great attributes in the course of His

Providence may be variously apprehended in this or that of His decrees, but there is never any difficulty in recognizing those decrees as the work of His will, and the hearts that love Him the best love His will above all things, and have the holy and blessed instinct of seeing it in all things, and of rejoicing in that more than all.

'All things are delivered unto Me by My Father, and no one knoweth the Son but the Father, neither doth any one know the Father but the Son, and he to whom it shall please the Son to reveal Him.' These words seem to explain what are these mysteries of the Kingdom which are hidden from the wise and prudent, and revealed unto little ones. 'The mysteries which the wise do not know, and which the little ones perceive, are the Divine Mission and Office which are entrusted to Me.' Our Lord said afterwards, in the great prayer to His Father which He made just before the beginning of His Passion, that 'this is eternal life, to know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ Whom Thou hast sent.'⁶ That is, to know God and to know the mystery of the Incarnation. The words which He now uses concerning the delivery of all things into His hands, may be understood either of the Divine Nature, or of His Sacred Humanity. For as God the Father communicates eternally to the Son the whole Divine Nature, He delivers to Him all things, the dominion of all things, along with that Divine Nature itself. But the context seems almost to require that these words should be understood directly of the Divine Person of the Son in His Sacred Human Nature, in which all things are delivered to Him in order that all things may be restored through and by Him. This is the sense of similar words in other places of the New Testament, as when St. John says, 'The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all

⁶ St. John xvii. 3.

things into His hand.⁷ Or as when, in the prayer of our Lord already mentioned, He says, ‘As Thou hast given to Him power over all flesh, that He may give eternal life to all whom Thou hast given Him.’ Or, as it is explained by St. Paul in his own way in the Epistle to the Ephesians, ‘That He might make known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure, which He hath purposed in Him, in the dispensation of the fulness of time, to re-establish all things in Christ that are in Heaven, on earth, in Him.’⁸ That is, that God hath made Jesus Christ, the Saviour and Restorer of mankind, the reconciliation between Himself and them, their Mediator, their Teacher, their Physician, and their Redeemer. This is the character in our Lord which the little ones acknowledged, and this is the character which the wise and foolish denied Him. The little ones, to use the words of St. John Baptist, said to Him in their hearts, ‘Thou art He that art to come, and we do not look for another.’ But the wise and prudent did not say so. They were always questioning the truth that He was He that was to come.

This, then, seems to be the sense in which our Lord here says that all things are delivered to Him by His Father. And yet this sense does not exclude another, in which the connection of these words with those which immediately precede them is insisted on in this way—that the perfect union of the Father’s will with the will of our Lord, His entire submission to the decrees of Providence, His joy at whatever those decrees might exact, simply because that decision embodied the will of His Father, became, as it were, a fresh reason why all power should be placed in His hands as the Son of Man. St. Paul tells us that our Lord ‘was heard (in His Prayer in the Garden) on account of His reverence,’⁹ as

⁷ St. John iii. 35.

⁸ Ephes. i. 9, 10.

⁹ Heb. v. 7.

if the perfect submission with which He prayed was a reason for granting all that He asked. And so here, our Lord has no sooner declared His joy in the carrying out of the decisions of His Father's choice, because it was His choice, than He declares also that He has received an absolute and entire power to make known His Father to whomsoever He will, as the Father has an absolute and entire power to make Him also known to whomsoever He will. And this meaning of the words corresponds to a great truth in the spiritual life, namely, that those who abandon themselves entirely to God's will, who make that will the great object of their love and their joy, have in return a most marvellous power of impetrating in prayer whatsoever they ask, as if the will of God became theirs, because they have made their own will His.

'And no one knoweth the Son but the Father, neither doth any one know the Father but the Son, and he to whom it shall please the Son to reveal Him.' No one, indeed, can know our Lord, except, as He said afterwards to St. Peter, the Father shall reveal Him to him. In this sense the little ones who had known our Lord had learnt their knowledge from the Father, and this teaching concerning the Incarnate Son is spoken of by our Lord as the giving of certain souls to Him by His Father, as that drawing of souls to Him by the Father of which He said soon after this, 'None can come to Me except the Father, Who hath sent Me, draw him,'¹⁰ and in other similar words at other times. But it seems as if our Lord was not here so directly speaking of the revelation of Himself, made by the Father, as of the commission which He had Himself received to make known the Father to mankind. This is a second part of that great commission which He had just spoken of,

¹⁰ St. John vi. 44.

when He said that all things had been delivered to Him by His Father. He was entrusted with the work not only of the redemption of the world by His Incarnation and Passion, but also of the enlightenment of the world by His teaching, personal, and through His Church. Thus He does not speak of the revelation of Himself by the Father as the only means by which He could be known to men, true though that doctrine would have been, because, in this place, He is setting forth that part of His Mission which consisted in the manifestation of the Father to whomsoever He would. For the revelation of the Father is not due to any one as a matter of right, it is a free gift of the Incarnate Son to those to whom He chooses to make the gift. ‘No man,’ says St. John ‘has seen God at any time. The only-begotten Son, Who is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him.’¹¹

This, then, is the great boon which the little ones have received, and which has been denied to the wise and the prudent, the knowledge of God communicated to them by our Lord Jesus Christ, after they have believed in Him and accepted Him as the Messenger and Ambassador of God. This has been hidden from the wise and prudent, by the just judgment of God, and revealed to the little ones by the munificent mercy of God. The words of our Lord go on further, for they go on both to promise the revelation of God to all who will come to our Lord, and to set aside the possible gloss that there had been something arbitrary and capricious in the selection of some for the favour of enlightenment, and the rejection of others from that favour. ‘Come to Me, all you that labour and are burthened, and I will refresh you. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me, because I am meek and humble of Heart,

¹¹ St. John i. 18.

and you shall find rest to your souls, for My yoke is sweet, and My burthen is light.'

Before explaining further in detail the sayings of our Lord in this great passage, it may be well to note that it is a continuous declaration, on the part of Himself and His Father, of the conditions on which the knowledge of the mysteries of the Kingdom, in the sense already explained, are to be imparted to men. It is true that our Lord begins with thanking and praising His Father for the rejection of the wise and prudent, and for the revelation of the things of which He is speaking to little ones, and He goes on to assign as the cause, both of this distinction between the two classes, and of His rejoicing therein, the free choice of His Father. But then He adds that there is the most perfect union and harmony between Himself and His Father as to all this distribution of the good things of the Kingdom, for all things are delivered unto Him by His Father. From this it follows, that if one person among the multitudes to whom His preaching is addressed has these good things and another has them not, it is because He has imparted to the one these blessings and has not imparted them to the other. It is the Father Who reveals Him to men, and it is He Who reveals to men the Father. He has said before that those, from whom these things were hidden, were the wise and prudent, and those to whom they are revealed are the little ones. But how can any one place himself within either of those two different classes? Is it a simple arbitrary act of our Lord that makes the distinction, choosing some and rejecting others without reasons furnished by themselves? No, for to belong to either of these classes is within the reach of any. For the wisdom and prudence which are bars to the reception of the revelation of the Father, are not true

wisdom and prudence, but pride and self-sufficiency for which those who labour under these defects are responsible. And the littleness and humility which are, as it were, the passports to these privileges, are qualities which are denied to none who seek them.

Thus we reach the doctrine that the one great need on the part of those who would profit by the teaching of our Lord concerning His Father, is the consciousness of the poverty and misery of our own condition, the sense of the need under which we lie of help and restoration by Him. We are told by some of the Fathers that the time of our Lord's coming was delayed so long, in order that men might learn by experience their need of Him, as if they would not have been so likely to accept His teaching if they had not before learnt this. In the same way, the preaching of the Baptist was the divinely ordained preparation for Him, and, as a matter of fact, those who did not feel the weight of a burthened conscience driving them to the confession of their sins, which was the great fruit of the teaching of St. John, did not come to our Lord for the relief of their own needs, and, in the end, ranged themselves against Him. Those who did feel their own needs were fit for His school, they were ready to take up the yoke which He laid on them, and submit to the burthen of the obligations, both as to belief and practice, which He insisted on. He speaks of refreshment and rest for their souls as the fruit of their submission to Him, on the condition of a yoke which was indeed, both positively and comparatively, sweet, and a burthen which in the same way was light. But the proud and self-satisfied do not feel inclined to put themselves under any yoke or to take up any burthen, for they think they are as well off as they wish to be, as they are. The sense of need and misery makes the souls, in which it

is found, ready for any conditions on which they may be offered relief and rest. They will come willingly to our Lord, for He promises them those things of which they are in need. As soon as they take up His yoke by submitting to His commandments, He enlightens them in reward for their obedience, and they come to be made capable of that knowledge of His Father and Himself, in which is eternal life.

Thus, in this great outbreak of ineffable charity. our Lord seems to have first before His mind the distinction which He had been drawing between the wise and prudent and the little ones who had, in truth, come to Him. Those who had come to Him had done so in great measure because they felt the need of Him, and those who had rejected Him had done so because they were not conscious of their own needs. There is also, as it seems, in His mind the contrast between the Old Dispensation and the New, the difference between the hard ways of the Law, with those who felt themselves to labour, and to be burthened, and the sweet and easy ways of the Gospel system which was to be founded on His sacrifice of Himself for man. But He does not speak severely of the old system, which had been established by His Father to prepare the people for Him, and which was to be fulfilled, not swept away violently, by the Gospel and the Church. Thus there is no contrast formally expressed in words, as in the former sentences. Our Lord only asserts the sweetness and lightness of His yoke and His burthen, and invites all who feel themselves to need relief to come to Him and find refreshment and rest to their souls. There is great force in the words of His promise, and they also contain a silent comparison. For the Law did not give perfect rest and refreshment to the penitent sinner, who found that refreshment, as in the case of David in his

Psalm of penance, in the thought of the acceptableness before God of a broken and contrite heart, and in the application of that precious Blood which was foreshown by the hyssop, more than in the external atonements provided by the Law. For he says, ‘If Thou hadst desired sacrifice, I would indeed have given it, with burnt offerings Thou shalt not be delighted. A sacrifice to God is an afflicted spirit, a contrite and humbled heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise.’¹³ That there is some reference to the Law and its imperfect provisions for human need, is suggested by the use of the word yoke, which is applied, both by St. Peter and St. Paul, in this sense of the bondage of the Law. St. Peter used it in the speech to the Council of Jerusalem when there was question of putting on the Gentile disciples the obligation of observing the Mosaic Law. ‘Now, therefore,’ he says, ‘why tempt ye God, to put a yoke on the necks of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?’¹⁴ And St. Paul uses the same expression in his argument to the same purpose to the Galatians, bidding them ‘be not held again under the yoke of bondage.’¹⁵ It is very likely that the use of the word by St. Peter came from his remembrance of this very saying of our Lord. But at the same time the meaning of the words of which we are speaking must not be limited to the comparison between the two Dispensations of God. For there are a thousand forms of labour and of bondage which are not included in the burthensomeness of the Jewish Law, which, after all, was not imposed on the larger portion of the human race, to the whole of which our Lord is now offering rest and refreshment. But it will be well to devote the next chapter to the consideration of all that may be included in these Divine words.

¹³ Psalm l. 19.

¹⁴ Acts xv. 10.

¹⁵ Galat. v.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Sweetness of our Lord's yoke.

St. Matt xi. 28—30 ; *Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 54.

IT is the characteristic of the system of our Lord, that no form or effect of human misery can lie outside the sphere of its healing power, and that it heals all, not by hiding or covering them up, as it were, or by making people forget them, but by turning them into joy. It may be that the perfect accomplishment of this is only to be carried out in the next world, but it is at least begun in a true manner in this. Now, then, that our Lord has declared that all things are placed in His hand by the Father, He proceeds to invite to Himself all that can be in need of relief. It is not this or that person that is invited, but every one who can come under the category of those who labour and are burthened. Labour and fatigue and weariness and discomfort—for all these things may be considered as signified by the first of the words which our Lord here uses—are internal and personal experiences or states, while a burthen of any kind is something mainly external, imposed on us from without. But the first of these things may well be the effect of the second. It is the burthen that we have to bear that makes us feel our state laborious and wearisome. Thus it is not necessary to seek for a distinct classification of the evils to which we feel ourselves subject under these two several heads. Our Lord may have had in His mind the description of human life in

the Book of Ecclesiasticus:¹ ‘Great labour is created for all men, and a heavy yoke is upon the children of Adam, from the day of their coming out of their mother’s womb, until the day of their burial into the mother of all. Their thoughts, and the fears of their hearts, their imagination of things to come, and the day of their end, from him that sitteth on a glorious throne, unto him that is humbled in earth and ashes: from him that weareth purple and beareth the crown, even to him that is covered with rough linen; wrath, and envy, trouble, unquietness, and the fear of death, continual anger and strife. And in the time of rest upon his bed, the sleep of the night changeth his knowledge. A little and as nothing is his rest, and afterwards in sleep as in the day of keeping watch. He is troubled in the vision of his heart, as if he had escaped in the day of battle. In the time of his safety he rose up, and wondereth that there is no fear. Such things happen unto all flesh, from man even to beast, and upon sinners are seven-fold more. Moreover, death and bloodshed, strife and sword, oppression, famine, and afflictions and scourges, all these things are created for the wicked, and for their sakes came the Flood.’

These sentences of the Wise Man sum up more or less what may be called the burthens and toils of life, and it is remarkable how large a part in the picture is given to the apprehensions of evil and calamity, and the unrest of conscience, anticipating future evils worse than those which are upon it now. And when all things are revealed at the day of account, it may well be that we shall be astonished to see how much the toil and hardships of life have been aggravated, to those whose conscience is not at peace, and who have not the light of the faith, by the questionings and surmises as to the

¹ Ecclus. xl. 1—10.

future, as to the coming Judgment, to which conscience bears witness, as to the means of getting rid of the sin with which they have to reproach themselves, and the terrible eternity which must be so evil, if it be not good, which haunt the men who bear themselves so bravely in the world, and who speak or write so contemptuously of the cowardly and foolish superstitions of the children of the Church. These anxieties about the unknown future, which are intensified by that consciousness of the possession of an immortal soul of which the most sceptical find it hard to divest themselves, are merciful pains left in such souls by the goodness of God, Who would fain make them enter into themselves, and learn not only their own labour and burthen, but the ways He has provided for ridding them of both. On the other hand, the mere physical sufferings to which human flesh is heir, such as pain and disease, and infirmity of every kind, and the hardships which are involved in the natural condition of our lives, such as poverty, or heat, or cold, or hunger, and the evils which result from the unequal distribution of the material things of this world are not counted up here by the sacred writer, although they make the life of so large a portion of mankind a life of continual drudgery and struggle against need. For these things are not really inconsistent with happiness and a light heart, and they are only made into real evils by the absence of faith in God, and of the resignation and detachment from temporal things which are but reasonable in any thoughtful person who understands his position in the order of God's Providence.

These corporal miseries are great in their degree, and they have not been uncared for by our Lord in His provision for the needs of mankind, as has often been said here. But the troubles and anxieties which are sketched out in the passage lately quoted are far greater,

and they oppress the mind and the imagination of the most cultivated and civilized of societies. In our own days they are making greater havoc than ever of the happiness of mankind. For, just in proportion to the boasted progress of false philosophy, and of the science which uses the partial discoveries of modern times to the destruction of faith instead of to the glory of God, is the influence gained by the poison of scepticism and by that most miserable state of thought which is a negation at once of God and of all the most certain and brightest hopes of humanity, together with the sense of moral obligation and responsibility, which in the mass of men is the only restraint upon the lowest passions. But though men may be persuaded by all this false teaching to violate their own consciences, they can never be persuaded that the future of those who so live is perfectly safe. And for one person who persuades himself, or thinks he persuades himself, to give up religion and make light of the law of conscience, there are scores whom the sceptical literature and teaching of the day throw into the most agonizing doubt and perplexity, without altogether convincing them. And if such persons look around them for some authority, speaking in the name of God, to guide them in the darkness, they are met by a score of pretenders to the one true throne of doctrine, each contradicting and reviling the others. The result is a condition of mental and moral misery, which is but poorly concealed by affected scorn of religion, or by the feverish excitement and laborious dissipation in which the modern world strives to escape from itself.

It is true that the Catholic Church still stands forth before the world, as the One Body which possesses, or even claims to possess, the attributes of the Spouse of Christ, as set forth in the ancient creeds. Many of the disciples of these false Churches, who have inherited

their position rather than chosen it for themselves—for who would chose, for instance, such a creed as that of Anglican Protestantism for himself?—do their best to stay the tide of infidelity, and write and speak mournfully of the decay of faith. They forget that they themselves and their false religions, which of necessity oblige their adherents to join in the thousand calumnies by which the Church is assailed, are greatly responsible for the state of thought in the society around them, because, as far as in them lies, they invalidate or obscure the evidence for the true Church, which alone can give satisfaction at once to the mind and to the heart. They prevent men from submitting to the Catholic Church, and they have nothing to give them instead of her. For however dull men may be about other things, they are most keen of sight and acute in their perceptions of inconsistencies, if they can find any, in what is presented to them as on the authority of God. It is related of St. Francis Xavier that he was astonished to find the bonzes in Japan able to bring up the subtlest objections of the scholastic disputants against the truths of the Faith, and he thought that the devil himself must have inspired them in their cavils. Men of the world at once understand the hollowness and incoherence of imperfect and self-conflicting schools of opinion, which set up private judgment under the name of Antiquity, and appeal to authorities which can never speak for themselves, which argue on Catholic grounds with Nonconformists, and on Protestant grounds with Catholics, which profess to look to one standard of faith, and yet admit of doctrines directly contradictory to one another in the same pulpits on successive Sundays. But outside the range of the not unwilling sceptics, who are so much helped on by the opposition to the Catholic Church on the part of those who claim to hold her doctrines and

even to imitate her forms of sacred worship, without obeying her authority, there is a large and almost countless mass of good but perplexed souls who do not wish to disbelieve in revelation, but who are sorely bewildered by the self-contradictions of those who profess to teach in the name of our Lord. And in other cases the same intellectual difficulties are the excuse for much moral delinquency, and men are encouraged by the uncertain teaching of the day to think that, after all, they may as well give in to the profanity mentioned by St. Paul, and say to themselves, ‘Let us eat and drink; for to-morrow we die.’ This is the direct and natural tendency of the most aggressive schools of philosophy in our time, although the teachers themselves are very angry when the truth is pointed out to them. Their disciples quite understand them, and a considerable portion of their popularity is owing to this. But their teaching makes the life of thousands miserable, who see in that teaching enough to raise doubts, but not enough to satisfy the mind.

Another great source of misery, which comes under the same head of labour, weariness, fatigue, and which makes life a burthen to many, is found in the truth that whenever there is a false or even an imperfect religion, there is also to be found an amount of mental and moral slavery which has no parallel in the kingdom of Truth. It is needless to say how true this is of all the heathen religions, which have been invented by the enemies of God and man for the purpose of deluding the souls which they hate with so bitter a hatred. We are apt to forget, commonly, that these false religions still hold in bondage the greater part of mankind. And there is no one of all these contrivances of Satan which is not marked by his peculiar characteristic of cruelty, and by encouragement directly given to the indulgence of the

most shameful lusts, which indulgence is constantly made parts of the worship of such religions. They all slander God and degrade man, and many of their precepts and doctrines are at variance with the natural law or with the soundest moral instincts of humanity. And thus it is difficult to believe that any thoughtful man who follows the law of his conscience, can find his mind at peace in such systems. It is among them that are to be found the most hideous superstitions, the most tyrannical forms of priestcraft, the most abominable rites and incantations, the most inhuman sacrifices. The best and most beautiful parts of heathenism are shown to us in what remains to us of the poetry and philosophy of Greece and Rome, for these works of genius embody the natural cravings of the human mind and heart after what is good and noble, after redemption from its miseries, after a knowledge of the truth as to itself and its God. We look back on these remains from the vantage ground of the faith, and we see how they witness at once to the goodness of God in His dealings with His fallen creatures, to the existence of ancient though half-obliterated traditions and even promises of relief, and to the sadness and mournfulness of all who were best, even among the naturally bright and brilliant Greeks, and the firm, strong, and law-loving Romans.

And what has been said thus in the fewest possible words of heathenism, as we know it commonly, may be said in due measure of all the imperfect forms of Christianity outside the Catholic Church. Putting aside their inconsistency in their appeal, when they do appeal, to antiquity, and in their explanation of the history of the Church of which they profess to form a part, they in any case defraud the soul of a great many helps and consolations which are a portion of the true system devised by Him Who knows all the needs of man, for

the support and relief and happiness of the children of God. We have constant witness to this truth in the complaints, even of the highest Protestants, that their religion has deprived them of many of the sacraments of which they feel the need and the beauty; that they are cut off from the communion of saints, that they are discouraged in their natural instincts to pray for the faithful departed, and the like. Unchristian creeds have a whole array of the most burthensome and cruel superstitions, and partially Christian creeds, if creeds they can be called, are constantly felt to curtail the provisions with which God has armed His Church for the very purpose which breathes in these loving words of our Lord, the consolation and relief of the soul. The conditions of salvation are made harder, and the teachers of these false sects, like the Pharisees of whom our Lord spoke, bind heavy burthens and lay them on men's shoulders, but do not lift a finger to help them to bear them. They exact obedience in matters in which no priest of God would venture to assert personal authority, and they force the most terrible truths upon frightened consciences without the corresponding doctrines and promise of mercy with which the Church accompanies them. Thus, in our own time and in our own country, we have had men preaching almost in so many words the irremissible character of sin after Baptism to populations utterly ignorant of the Sacrament of Penance, and again, the necessity of confession as the one condition of remission, to persons who have been brought up, according to the undeniable teaching of their own religion, to consider the Sacrament of Penance as a modern corruption. It is certainly a hardship to souls which our Lord does not mean them to have to bear, when they are told in the same breath that their own system does not, as a matter of fact and practice, provide them with what is

essential for their spiritual comfort, and also that they must on no account emancipate themselves from that same system, because it is the one true Church of Jesus Christ.

These last remarks lead us naturally to the consideration of another most serious head of human misery and labour, that, namely, which consists in the consciousness of sin and the inability to get rid of it. Here again it is probable that many a man who braves it out with his friends, as if he was almost proud of his sins, is eaten up at times by secret remorse of conscience, from which he knows not how to deliver himself. We hear every now and then of the conspicuous death-bed conversions of professed infidels, and it cannot be but that, for one of which we hear, there are scores of which no record reaches us. And these men themselves witness to the truth of this. For they bind themselves beforehand by solemn pledges not to give way, as they deem it, under the terrors of death, and they watch by the dying beds of their confederates with as much eagerness as a Sister of Charity might watch, only that she would watch for an opportunity of suggesting thoughts of penitence and hope, and they watch for the diabolical purpose of excluding every visitor or friend, however near and dear, who might help the poor soul to make its peace with its God. The sister must not come to the dying brother, the child to the dying father, the wife to her husband, lest some word of loving piety might light up the smouldering spark of long-stifled faith into a tiny flame, which might be fanned by the ministrations of the Church, and so defeat the expectation of the fiends already gathering round their prey. What are all these Satanic precautions but witnesses to the difficulty of drowning in utter silence the voice of conscience? The men who give themselves up to justice rather than bear

about in their own hearts the burthen of an undiscovered crime, are other witnesses to the universality of the truth that an evil conscience is its own most cruel punishment. Sin may be got rid of in two senses, as when the sinner is delivered from the guilt of his sins by the pardon conveyed in absolution, or when he is further delivered from the tyranny of habitual sin by receiving grace to amend his life. In each case a great burthen is cast away, a life which before was oppressed and toilsome is made light, joyous, and easy, at peace concerning the past and full of hope for the future. But men cannot do this for themselves, unless they are capable of an act of contrition, and of using the appointed means of reconciliation and recovery which our Lord has provided, and here again all imperfect forms of Christianity are unable to give peace to the soul in the way He has devised. So men drag about with them the consciousness of their past sins; they struggle intermittently, and with very feeble success, against the bad habits and dispositions which still remain in their souls, and they have indeed need of some One who will give them refreshment and peace.

And lastly, at the end of this catalogue of the burthens of human life, we must place what are in truth great burthens to those who have not the light and grace of the Catholic Church, and which are not without their wearisome effects on those who have those blessings. These are the physical evils of life inherent in the normal conditions of human existence, in its present fallen state. Such are the sufferings which come from natural weakness and feebleness, infirmities, sickness, the tortures which are inflicted by some diseases, the sufferings which men have to endure from the rigours of climate, the violence of the elements, and the like. These sufferings are the lot of a very large portion of the human race, and

of some they are the lot almost from the day of their birth to the moment of their death. In many cases they are the consequences of sin and self-indulgence on the part of the parents of those who are so afflicted, and they are aggravated by the hard social condition under which they find themselves, by no fault of their own. It is easy to forget their existence if we choose to shut our eyes to them. The man in the full command of his faculties, bodily and mental, does not of necessity reflect on the unmerited boons which he enjoys, while others are without them, nor does he know the miseries caused to others by the want of these things, of which he makes hardly any account, and for which he never gives thanks to God. The rich never think what it would be to be like the great majority of their fellow-creatures, to live from day to day without any certainty of food for the morrow, for themselves and their children. We do not consider what a misery it would be to be deprived of the use of our eyes or ears by disease, or to live the living death which is the only life of so many who suffer from chronic and incurable maladies. And yet this kind of existence is the only life that many men know. Those who live in temperate climates and in countries which inherit the acquirements and inventions of the civilization of so many centuries, are little aware of the hardships which beset existence in other parts of the world, where men have to be constantly at war with the wild beasts to keep them down, or where, for example, the Arctic winter reigns for so many months in the year, and where life can only be supported under conditions which reduce men almost of necessity to a level with the animals. In such regions the most joyous and luxurious moments of life are such as would seem torments to any men but the races that are accustomed to those climates, and who know no more of the gifts of nature than such as their

own hard lot provides. And to all these miseries must be added those for which man is himself responsible, such as the evils of wars and invasions, the strife of nations and the ambition of rulers, powerful enough to overwhelm whole countries at a few days' notice with bloodshed and devastation, in which all the fiercest and most savage passions are freely indulged. The miseries that are thus let loose on humanity—and they are certainly not less in civilized and Christian times than in any others that have preceded them—are usually felt the most by the weakest and poorest members of the community, at least by those who have had but little share in causing the quarrels which have occasioned them. They are most truly the scourges of God, as much as the plagues and famines which He sends from time to time to chastise the world. Under this head also come the miseries which are the result of the unequal conditions of the various classes in society, which are often aggravated almost beyond endurance by the hardness of heart of the rich and powerful, the unnatural overcrowding of great cities, and other social tyrannies which make the struggle for life among the destitute almost like that which might ensue between a number of wild animals, driven by the rising of a great flood to the narrow summit of a mountain. And besides the miseries to which human life is heir on account of the present conditions of our existence, there are others which are brought on each person, or each family, or community, by themselves, or their members. For the whole particular Providence of God is an administration of holy discipline and chastisement, or of sufferings sent by way of warning or precaution, and these cannot but require much virtue and patience, much intelligence of the ways of God, to enable men to bear them as they ought to be borne.

All these heads may be supposed to come under the

general description of the state of the world by our Lord, when He speaks of men as labouring and being burthened. The sufferings and toils are very various in character, physical, moral, social, intellectual, and the first requirement for their alleviation is light, by means of which men understand what they are and from Whom they come. Thus it is very natural indeed that our Lord should subjoin this invitation of His to the words which have gone immediately before about the revelation of the Father, which it is in His power to make to whom He will. His mission in the world is thus described by the father of the Blessed John Baptist in the words with which the *Benedictus* concludes : ‘To enlighten them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace.’ Men are aware that they are being dealt with by God in the Providence which rules their lives, and they judge of Him, accordingly, as much by that as by what they have been taught concerning Him as a part of their religion. Our Lord does not merely shed light in upon the souls of those who are wearied and heavily burthened in all these various ways, for He pours balm into their wounds and supplies them with food for their support and strength. But the process begins, it may be said, with enlightenment, and this whole process of enlightenment may well be called the revelation of His Father.

If we take the different burthens of men, one by one, the whole lower range of the evils of which we have been speaking, those which are chiefly physical and temporal, are not so directly relieved by our Lord, except in the way of enabling men to see that they come from a Father’s hand and are a discipline of love, and in that other way also, which consists in the working in the world and in society of the principles of charity and benevolence of every kind for love of Him, on which working He relies

largely for the justification of the government of the world. With regard to the moral miseries of sin, the remorse of conscience for the past, the dreary anticipation of inevitable and unending punishment, and the painful and most laborious struggle against sins of habit and the like—all these are relieved directly by our Lord, both by His teaching, and by the grace which He applies through the sacraments, and in answer to prayer. The more purely intellectual troubles of which we spoke first in this enumeration, and which in many cases are the most painful of all, while in others they become encouragements to moral delinquencies, are cured in their root by the light of faith, which sets at rest the troubled questionings of the soul. The evils of false and imperfect teachings are removed in the same way, and, at the same time, the mind is filled with peace as well as light, and the hard burthens and obligations of the false or imperfect religions which have usurped the place of authority in the soul, are supplanted by the gentle and sweet obligations of the Gospel Law. In every department of human existence which has been made hard, bitter, sour, constrained, and toilsome, by the conditions under which life had to be fought out without our Lord, the fruit of His rule is best described by His own words of rest and refreshment.

Our Lord does not profess to do all this for men without certain conditions on their part, conditions very natural for Him to exact, and such as no one who was not foolish could refuse, if he really felt his need of deliverance from the many miseries which surround his life. The two sentences in which our Lord's invitation are conveyed, answer, one to the other, as the strophes of a stanza of poetry. First He says, 'Come to Me,' and in the second place, 'Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me,' and then, on the other hand, He promises,

first of all, ‘I will refresh you,’ and in the second place, ‘You shall find rest for your souls.’ Thus men are invited to come to Him, that is, to take on them the yoke of our Lord and ‘to learn of Him,’ and they are promised refreshment and rest for their souls. The word yoke has been understood by some as signifying that we are to take up a burthen which is borne by another as well as by ourselves, that other being our Lord. It is true that in a great number of particulars our Lord does bear our yoke with us, and His companionship in the hardships of this valley of tears is the greatest possible consolation and support to us, as well as the source to us of infinite graces. And when we put ourselves under the yoke which He lays upon us, we unite ourselves to Him and have nothing to bear which He does not bear with us. But the simple meaning of the words in this place seems to be, that we are invited to submit ourselves to the rule which our Lord lays upon us, as those who show themselves subjects by putting on the yoke of their masters. And as the miseries from which we are to be delivered are miseries of the mind and intelligence as well as of the will, the yoke of our Lord is twofold, the subjection of the intelligence to the rule of faith, and the submission of the will to the law of God.

And again, as to the second clause of this invitation, when our Lord says, ‘Learn of Me, for I am meek and humble of Heart,’ the words may be understood either as suggesting His meekness and humility as a reason for the submission which our Lord requires of us, or as indicating the subject-matter of the lesson which we are to learn, that is meekness and humility of heart. The words ‘learn of Me,’ seem certainly to imply that it is the example of our Lord which we are to study, at least as if this were the way by which the taking up

His yoke was to be accomplished. In this sense, the first condition for the subjection to His yoke of which He speaks, is the learning of Him to be meek and humble of heart. In this way the two interpretations can be combined into one, if we first learn of our Lord's example the virtues of meekness and humility, and then go on in His school to learn all the other parts of what He calls His yoke and His burden. And thus we come to the truth, that humility is the one first condition of admittance into the Kingdom, though, after men are once admitted, they have a number of other virtues to learn, and a number of truths to accept by the submission of faith, besides these principal conditions of meekness and humility, and it is certainly true that these qualities make every thing easy in the rule of our Lord. They make it easy both for the intelligence to let itself be made captive in the glorious bondage of faith, and for the will to bend to the yoke of the law of God. Thus the invitation may be understood, 'Come to Me and learn of Me meekness and humility of heart, and, when you have gained those virtues, all other parts of My teaching and of My rule will be easy to you, and you will find rest to your souls, for to such persons My yoke is sweet and My burthen is light.' In the same way it is said in the Psalms, 'The Lord is sweet and righteous, therefore shall He give a law to sinners in the way, He will guide the mild in judgment, He will teach the meek His ways.'² The rest to the soul which He promises, is thus something conditional on the obedience of those who come to Him, and the lesson which they learn first of all, as a foundation for everything else, which He has to teach them, is the lesson of His meekness and humility of heart. Without these, men are not capable of entering

² Psalm xxiv. 8. 9.

His school, and so they cannot receive the rest and refreshment which belong to the observance of His Commandments. There can be no peace where there is not order, and the only way of securing internal order, and so peace to the soul, is obedience to law.

Our Lord may have had in His mind the words of the Psalm, in which the law of God is spoken of as so delightful, ‘The law of the Lord is unspotted, converting souls, the testimony of the Lord is faithful, giving wisdom to little ones. The justices of the Lord are right, rejoicing hearts, the commandment of the Lord is lightsome, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is holy, enduring for ever and ever. The judgments of the Lord are true, justified in themselves. More to be desired than gold, and many precious stones, and sweeter than honey and the honeycomb.’³ In this and other passages it is remarkable, again, how much the light and joy of the soul are made to come from obedience, which is, in truth, the great condition of enlightenment, while the light which it engenders brings with it peace and delight in the practice of the Commandments, as the Psalmist goes on to say, ‘For Thy servant keepeth them, and in keeping them there is a great reward.’ Thus the consideration of the reward of obedience as set before us by the light of faith, as well as the knowledge which our faith supplies to us of the character of God and of our Lord Himself, go far towards making the obedience which we practise easy and light. Moreover, the keeping of the Commandments brings ever fresh grace to the soul, and this is a part of the sweetness and lightsomeness and delightfulness of which the Psalmist speaks. For a yoke is sweet if it is known to be reasonable, if we understand that it is put on us out of love, and in consideration of

³ Psalm xviii. 8--10.

our own greatest good, rather than for any other motive, and if we are able to enter into the beautiful designs of God in forbidding what is hurtful to us and enjoining what is, in itself, even apart from His commandment, a source of happiness and spiritual strength.

We here touch on the greatest of all the differences which have been made in the condition of men by the work of our Lord on the earth. It is most true that the commandments of the Lord are sweet, and that they fully deserve all the praises which are given to them in the passage from the Psalm just now quoted. And yet it is most true also that we owe an immense increase in this sweetness and graciousness of the law, as it is set before us, to the personal Presence of our Lord among us. It is no longer simply a law, a commandment, a testimony, judgments, justices. Our Lord's invitation is not to His law, but to Himself. It is always, 'Come unto Me, take My yoke, learn of Me,' and the like. He has clothed Himself with our poor nature for this very purpose, made Himself one of us, and learnt by experience all the miseries and difficulties of our condition, and by His own touch has made them tolerable. The invitation comes to us winged with all the intense beauty and attractiveness of the Sacred Humanity. The life to which He invites us is a continual personal intercourse and companionship with Himself. We are first to throw ourselves into the arms of His infinite love and compassionateness, and only after that are we to take His yoke upon us. All our steps, in the way of His service and of our own salvation, are guided and supported by Him. We receive no grace except by communication with Him, the cleansing of our souls is the application of His precious Blood, the strengthening of our spiritual life is the feeding upon Him, the path along which we are to walk has already been stamped for us

by His footsteps, showing us where to plant our own. He is all around us in the Church, He lives in us and we in Him, and especially in all matters in which there is something hard, something of the Cross to be borne, we have His example and His strength to make the burthen as light as He promises us it shall be.

These thoughts prepare us for the concluding words of our Lord in this loving invitation, in which He gives as a reason for their finding rest and refreshment for their souls, the character of the requirements on which He insists. ‘You shall find rest to your souls,’ He says, ‘for My yoke is sweet and My burthen is light.’ We may consider in the first place the yoke which our Lord puts on the intelligence, as it is so often said, by the truths of faith which He reveals and enjoins on our acceptance. It may be said that we have more to believe than the Jews, to whom many doctrines which are of faith now were not so clearly declared or enjoined as matters of obedience. There is, no doubt, in the human unregenerate heart a rebellious instinct, the child of pride, which rises up against the obligation of accepting truths which it cannot discover or understand of itself. But this rebelliousness is unreasonable, and is already more than half-conquered by the submissiveness and readiness to receive what God may set on us, which is a part of the humility and meekness of which our Lord had spoken. And in the second place, it is not at all true that the number of doctrines makes faith more difficult. On the contrary, each new doctrine, if we are so to speak of them, sheds fresh light on others which were already known, and in this way takes off some part of the difficulty. How is it easier to believe that God made the world, than to believe that God made it, and also has redeemed it? How is it easier to believe that our Lord redeemed us on the Cross,

than to believe that He has redeemed us there and has also left behind Him, in the sacramental system, the means of the continual and easy application of the fruits of His Passion for the needs of souls? How is it easier to believe that God has established the Church as the teacher of mankind, than to believe that He has done this and has also preserved her from all error, as to faith or morals, by the gift of infallibility which is seated in the See of St. Peter? The doctrines of the Christian Creed shed an immense light on the character and attributes of God, and in this way they make the simple acceptance of the truths, even of natural religion, more easy. The system of doctrine which the Church presents to her children is a harmonious and beautiful whole, revealing an amount of tender consideration and thought for the miseries of our condition and the risks of our future, which fills the mind with consolation, and so makes it a joy to believe that so many loving things on the part of God to man are infallibly true and cannot be gainsaid.

This may be said on the general character of the Christian truths, and it is a matter constantly witnessed to by those outside the Church, many of whom are often found to say that they would most gladly believe such truths if they could. And, in the second place, if the truths which we are called on to believe are such as it is a blessing to be assured of, such as we should wish to have made certain to us on the authority of God, it is also very true indeed to say that the easiness of belief, which may be of very various degrees, depends for its measure on the amount and character of the evidence on which our assent is required. Now, as to this, our Lord imposes nothing on our minds which is not witnessed to by evidence of that overwhelming kind, which is only not mathematically convincing,

because it would not then be the kind of evidence on which faith is to rest. And this evidence is, as we may say, ever accumulating and growing in cogency to men of good hearts and minds not warped by prejudice, because the centuries, as they pass on, bear each one a fresh and independent witness to the blessings which the Church can confer on mankind, and the perpetual notes of the Church, her Holiness, her Catholicity, her Apostolicity, and her Unity, are always being re-asserted, as it were, by a crowd of saints and by men who are the lights of their respective generations. So again the continual warfare of the world against the Church, which is so often on the point of being swallowed up in the waves, and yet always surmounts them, is a testimony to the Divinity that dwells in her, which is ever fresh to the eyes of the mass of men as well as of the philosophical historian. On this account then, the burthen and the yoke of our Lord, as far as regards the truths of the faith, may truly be called sweet, that is good, kindly, beneficial in their effects and gentle in their incidence.

The same must certainly be said, if we pass on to the yoke and burthen of our Lord as they consist in obligations on the moral part of man. Of course, in the first place, the light of faith makes many obligations easier, because it reveals the goodness of God Who imposes the law, the right He has to impose it, and the immense rewards which await the faithful and obedient soul. The Psalmist, as already quoted, declares that the laws of God convert the soul, give wisdom to little ones, rejoice the heart, and enlighten the eyes. If this was true under the Law, in which so much was known about God, it must be much more so under the Gospel, in which He is more fully revealed. And again, the very fulness and strictness of the Gospel law has an advantage over less perfect declarations of the will of God,

because it satisfies the conscience in a way that a mere external code cannot. Let us take as instances the examples given by our Lord Himself in the Sermon on the Mount, when He contrasts His own most searching requirements with those of the glosses put on the Commandments by the Jewish schools. Let us grant that it is at first sight more terrible to think that we are responsible to our God and Judge for the angry thought, or the lascivious imagination, than to think that what merely defiles the heart and does not go forth into word or action is our own affair only, and a matter for which we shall not be called to account. Yet surely the conscience cannot rest in peace under such a doctrine. It must be a part of man's interior experience that sin begins in the heart, that it is from the heart, as our Lord says, that all sins proceed, and that there can be no true wiping away of sin unless the guilt of the heart is purified. And again, if a malady is to be healed and taken away, it must be by the removal of its source and root, and a man who understands that he must watch over his heart and put himself to interior penance for whatever of evil passes there with deliberate complacency, is much more likely to be able to restrain himself from the external act of sin, than a man who takes no heed, except of the outward manifestations and results of his anger, his injustice, his malice, his impurity. In this sense it is not a hard, but a wise and loving treatment of the sinner to tell him that he must give an account of every evil thought, for to do this enlightens him as to the source of evil, and at the same time satisfies the instinctive teachings of his conscience. In this sense, perhaps, it is that the Psalmist says that these judgments of the Lord are true, justified in themselves, as if they carried with them, as soon as they are promulgated, their own warranty.

There is another sense in which our Lord's yoke is sweet and His burthen light, and this is the sense which rests on the immense help to any one who has to keep a commandment which is conveyed by a perfect example of its fulfilment. In this sense our Lord has made His yoke sweet, because He attracts us to obedience, not only by authority and by promise of reward, but also by example. He has caught our heart to Himself, and thus it becomes easy to follow One Who is so much an object of love. He first says, 'Come to Me, and learn of Me,' and then He adds that His yoke is sweet and His burthen easy. The whole path of the Christian is lit up by the example of Jesus Christ, and it is an example which, because it is His, gives us grace at the same time as light. And again, the way of God's commandments, the virtuous, faithful, just, patient, devout life which has been led by the children of God from the beginning, has been made to glow with light and beauty, and fresh glories and splendours of holiness have been unveiled to arouse the soul and kindle the heart by the example of our Lord and His Saints. 'God, Who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.'⁴ These words may be applied to that glory of God which results from the keeping of His commandments, and thus we may compare the difference between the law of God, as observed without our Lord, and the same law as observed with Him, to the difference between the universe wrapped in darkness, before the creation of light, and the same universe when its magnificence and beauty came to be bathed and set forth in that hitherto unknown splendour. The world was, as far as we know, the same before as afterwards, but the mantle of light made it a new creation.

⁴ 2 Cor. iv. 6.

Thus, then, since our Lord has lived on earth, and shown man the way to please His eternal Father, the grandeur and glory and force and strength of which human life is capable are revealed to us, like the mountains and groves and cities and palaces which surround some most beautiful gulf into which a ship has drifted in the night, having seen the darkness fall while it was still out of sight of land. How can it be doubted that this illumination of the 'Face of Jesus Christ,' as St. Paul speaks, must make the practice of virtue easier, by making it infinitely sweeter, by displaying all the beauty of humility and of purity, all the nobleness of meekness and charity, the greatness of zeal for God's glory, the heroic magnanimity of patience and self-sacrifice? The Psalmist says, 'I have run the way of Thy commandments, when Thou hast enlarged my heart.'⁵ And this is certainly the effect on all good souls of the vision of the Christian virtues as practised by our Lord. And it is a part of the same blessing, that we have the example of our Lord in this respect reflected to us from the lives of thousands of His saints, for without this it would be easy to see how we should fail from discouragement and diffidence, and for want of faith in the graces of the Church. For it would then be the case that our Lord had set a high and beautiful example and had seemed to make the way of perfection easy thereby, but that the experience of the Christian centuries had taught us that no one could follow Him, that His example was not only unattainable in full perfection of imitation, which is true, but that it was altogether above our powers to imitate it in a measure with success, which is most false. Nor, again, is the example of the Saints only illumination, and nothing more. They have won their crown for themselves, and the same conflicts which have been so fruitful

⁵ Psalm cxviii. 32.

of glory to them have also made them powerful to aid us by their intercession and patronage.

To this it must of course be added that our Lord has made His yoke sweet and His burthen light, by giving us immense forces, not simply of light how to imitate Him and how to see the beauties of the path which the commandments point out to us, but above all by the copious supplies of strength which He provides for us in the Church. For the weight of a burthen is relative to the strength of those who have to bear it, and it is the same thing to add to their strength and to diminish the positive weight of the burthen they have to take up. In this sense, of course, it is most true that the yoke of our Lord is sweet, because He has breathed into us new forces and kindled in us a vigour and a power which were before altogether unknown. It is true that the grace of God was never denied to man, and He always assisted those who did what they could. But in the Christian system there is a whole array of the means of grace, which were unknown before, the whole power of the merits of the Sacred Passion, the gifts of the Holy Ghost Who is given to us and Who works in us the works of the children of God—all these things constitute an armament of grace of which there was but little fore-taste under the Old Dispensation. Thus the level of power has been raised, at the same time that in some respects the level of the commandments has also been raised, but, in proportion, the increase of strength is far greater than the increase of the obligations laid on us.

Even in matters of obligation there is an immense difference between the old yoke and the new. The Fathers who comment on this passage and on others like it, dwell very much on the deliverance of Christians from the burthens of the Old Law, of which St. Peter said in the Council of Jerusalem that neither their fathers nor

themselves were able to bear it, and from this our Lord delivered us on the Cross, on which He took on Himself the curse of those who disobeyed the Law, and so removed the obligation. We are not so familiar with this thought, which yet is very prominent in the Epistles of St. Paul, and no one ever passes from the bondage of an imperfect form of Christianity, or of a false religion, to the liberty of the Church, or from the service of the world to the service of God, without feeling that the chains he has discarded were far heavier than any obligations he has taken up anew.

In comparison to the Jewish external obligations, those of the children of the Church are light indeed. This point is too clear to be needful of explanation, but it may be worth while to say a few words on the new obligations, as they may be deemed, of the Gospel Law. No doubt there are certain things to which Christians are obliged, which were not in the same way obligatory on the Jews. Such, for instance, is the obligation, under all but exceptional circumstances, of the confession of sins for the purpose of absolution, and such again, may be considered the law of the unity and indissolubility of marriage, which our Lord declares to be the original law, but which was in abeyance under the Mosaic system. These obligations may be fairly taken as specimens of whatever there is of new or more stringent in the Gospel code, and we may say of them that they exactly illustrate the words of our Lord here, for they are the obligations of a kind which are in themselves worthy of the name of sweet. That is, it is true that they put a certain restraint on human liberty in the one case, and they exact a certain amount of self-humiliation in the other case. But in both cases the obligation is not a simple act of arbitrary law, an injunction set us for the sake of subjecting us to

obedience and nothing else. On the contrary, the necessity of confession for the right and intelligent administration of the power of the keys is manifest, and therefore the complaint should be made against God for committing the power of absolution to men, rather than for insisting on a condition which is essential to the intelligent and charitable exercise of that power. People might as well complain of the necessity of intention in the administration of Baptism, or in the consecration of the adorable Sacrifice of the Altar, or of anything else that is necessary as a condition in any sacrament.

And again, the little shame and self-humiliation which have to be undergone in the practice of confession, are a certain consolation to the soul, which would not feel satisfied with itself if it had not done some little thing towards securing the remission of the sins of which it is conscious. On the other hand, the necessity of confession opens to the soul a whole world of aids and helps of which it would be otherwise deprived, for it would not then be warned against its particular dangers, it would not have the light which comes from its self-knowledge, laid bare before a spiritual guide, and a great many other special graces which are linked to the practice of which we are speaking. Some of the communities which fell away from Catholic Unity at the time of the Reformation put an end to the practice of particular confession, if not by strict enactment, at least by leaving it open and discouraging it as unnecessary, and we find that, as a matter of fact, few of their members, who know anything about the power of the keys and think that they have among them true priests however schismatical, are content to let their consciences find peace in the general confessions and absolutions in their services. And it may be most certainly affirmed as an indisputable truth,

that although, as has been said, many peoples of Europe fell away for the sake of getting rid of the obligation of confession, there is no reasonable man among them all who, if he knew what the comforts and helps of the practice are, would not most gladly have recourse to it, and would not gladly teach it to his children. In this, as in so many other cases, it is the falsehood spread abroad by the ministers of evil against the so-called burthens of the Church, that frightens men away from her on account of them.

Much the same may be said of the other point mentioned above, namely, the new obligations of the Christian law in the matter of marriage. These obligations are founded in reason and in the natural law, and there is nothing of that kind in the Kingdom of God which is not in itself salutary and full of what our Lord calls sweetness. The whole condition of woman in the world depends on the law of marriage. Communities which possess so many fruits of the long reign of Christianity as are inherited by the modern nations of Europe, may do away with the indissolubility of marriage without perhaps relapsing all at once into the old conditions of Pagan society. No one ventures at present to argue for the restoration of polygamy among civilized nations. But it is not less true that the chief social glory of the Christian Church consists in what she has done for the weaker and poorer and more oppressed classes, and that of all the great things which she has achieved in this way, none is more glorious than her restoration of woman to the place of the companion and equal of man. He would be a bold philosopher who would deny that this has been brought about mainly by the elevation of marriage to the rank of a sacrament, by its unity, by the forbiddance of divorce, by the side of which has come the exaltation of the virgin life.

Thus it is seen that even for their own sakes, this and other new enactments of our Lord, are full, as He says, of sweetness. Nor again must it be omitted in the consideration of the character of these enactments that they are all, more or less, connected with sacraments of the New Law, and so with abundant supplies of certain graces, fitted to enable men to discharge these new obligations. The souls on which the obligations of indissoluble marriage, of the virgin life consecrated by vow, of clerical celibacy, and the like, are laid, are not left in the condition of the subjects of the Old Law, much less of those among heathen nations who strove to keep up, as far as in them lay, the law of Nature and the authority of conscience. The Christian husband and wife have special graces for the maintenance of the holiness of their obligations, and a new world of human happiness has been created for them. The priest at the altar, consecrated to the offering of the daily Sacrifice of the Immaculate Lamb, has a thousand aids of his own, provided by Him Who has imposed the rule upon him, for the preservation of the glory and dignity of his state. The virgin vowed to God, whether in the world or within the walls of a religious home, has aids, external and internal, to keep her worthy of her Heavenly Spouse. Here again it may be most truly said that the commandment brings its own reward to those who observe it faithfully, while its faithful observance benefits not only the particular soul who thus serves the Lord of all, but the whole community, the Church herself, and the world outside the Church. Men do not live or die to themselves, as St. Paul says, but to our Lord, and in this sense also His yoke is sweet and His burthen light, because the practice of the lofty Christian virtues by any one is a benefit to all around him, and the practice of the counsels of perfection, in which, though they are not

matters of obligation, the practical yoke of our Lord for many consists, is a benefit to the whole world. Nor do any find more truth in the words of our Lord about the sweet yoke and the light burthen, than those who take on themselves yokes and burthens even beyond the obligations which bind all the faithful. And those who follow the severest rules in the Church, and give themselves most entirely to the life of penance and mortification which they have taken up as a voluntary sacrifice to Him, have the greatest and the most constant experience of the faithfulness with which He fulfils the promise which His loving invitation conveys.

CHAPTER XIX.

The Coming of Magdalene.

St. Luke vi. 36—50; *Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 55.

ALTHOUGH the order of events, at this period of our Lord's Ministry, is not laid down for us with any great precision by any definite declarations of the Evangelists as to the sequence of what they tell us, there is still very good reason for thinking that we can trace that order with a fair amount of certainty. It has already been said that a great part of those words of our Lord which were considered by us in the last chapter, were probably uttered by Him on more than one occasion, and also that the occasion on which they are related by St. Matthew, is not identical with the occasion with which they are connected by St. Luke. It is, however, remarkable that the report in St. Luke, which seems certainly to belong to the last great period of our Lord's public teaching, stops short at the end of the 'con-

fession,' or thanksgiving, of our Lord to His Father, for the revelation of the mysteries concerning Himself to the little ones, after the rejection of the wise and prudent, and that the third Evangelist omits the subsequent sentences, in which our Lord speaks of Himself as the only One Who has power to make men know the Father, which form the last words in the report in St. Matthew, and contain our Lord's most loving and touching invitation to all who labour and are burthened to come to Him, in order that they may find rest and refreshment for their souls. Nor can any more natural and obvious reason be assigned for this omission on the part of St. Luke than the supposition that, on that later occasion, towards the end of His public teaching in the land of Judea, on which our Lord repeated those other words which St. Luke does record, the latter portion of the discourse, as reported by St. Matthew at an earlier period, was not subjoined. Indeed, at that later time, the words of this gracious invitation might have seemed less in place.

But the next event in the history, which would naturally be placed next in order to this first utterance of our Lord by a careful harmonist, even if he were altogether uninfluenced by the beautiful teaching which is contained in the juxtaposition of the two sections of the narrative, will be seen at once to derive fresh light from what has immediately preceded it, and to shed, in return, a striking light upon the words last recorded. This incident is related by St. Luke alone, and it evidently belongs to that earlier period of the Public Life on which we are now engaged. It seems to be almost necessarily connected with the words of our Lord, which St. Matthew alone has inserted, at the conclusion of the set of discourses or remarks which followed on the mission of the disciples of St. John Baptist, and the

eulogy which our Lord afterwards pronounced on the Baptist himself. This connection furnishes us with an altogether incidental illustration of the perfect accuracy of the Evangelists. St. Luke has omitted certain words of our Lord which St. Matthew has recorded, and he has apparently omitted them for the reason already given: because they were not repeated at a later time, and he is recording what our Lord did then repeat. But he has added to the context, as it stands in St. Matthew, the incident of which we are now about to speak, and the connection between the words of our Lord in St. Matthew and the incident thus supplied by St. Luke is so beautiful, as to furnish us with one of the most striking results of the careful study of the Gospel harmony. There cannot possibly be a more appropriate introduction to the narrative of St. Luke, than the report of our Lord's words in St. Matthew. Nor can there be a more touching commentary on those words of our Lord, than the incident which St. Luke has supplied. It may almost be said that the two passages, in the two Evangelists, are necessary to each other by a kind of Divine necessity, founded on the power and fruitfulness of such words as those which we have lately been commenting on as given us in the report of St. Matthew. The action of the blessed Magdalene is, in this sense, the natural sequel of the invitation to the wearied and burthened, and that invitation supplies the motive for the action of the Magdalene.

It is here, then, that we first meet with that blessed penitent, whose name has become so famous in the Church of God, as our Lord promised that it should. The scene of the incident is not settled for us exactly by any statement of the Evangelist. It may have been at Naim, where the widow's son had lately been raised to life, it may have been in Mary's own town of

Magdala, on the borders of the lake, it may have been in Capharnaum, to which spot our Lord may have returned, for some short interval, in the course of His Apostolic circuit. ‘And one of the Pharisees desired Him to eat with Him.’ His name was Simon, a name very common indeed in the Holy Land and in the New Testament narrative. He may have meant to patronize our Lord, but there is nothing in the story as related by St. Luke to show that he was among the enemies of our Lord at this time. Certainly he did not show Him any extraordinary courtesy, for this fact comes out in the subsequent narrative. He was probably one of a class very large at that time—the class of men who were attracted to our Lord by the beauty of His character, the splendour of His miracles, and the Divine authority of His teaching, but who had not made up their minds whether to throw themselves altogether at His feet, or to hold aloof until something more clear became manifest as to the character of His Mission. It is hardly possible, under the circumstances, especially considering the strong opposition with which our Lord was now met by the Jewish authorities, that this class should not have been very numerous. But it is certain that this Pharisee was heartily desirous, as is implied in the words of St. Luke, of knowing more of our Lord than he did.

‘And behold a woman that was in the city, a sinner.’ The question of the identification of this woman with St. Mary Magdalene has been touched on in the introductory volumes of this work, and need not be repeated in this chapter. We assume the common and traditional belief to be the true belief, not only because it is common and traditional, but also for the strongest reasons of criticism and harmony. But if we thus assume it to be true that this woman is no other than the blessed Magdalene, it becomes necessary to take into account,

at this place, what is elsewhere said about that great Saint, and which must be supposed to refer to a part of her life antecedent to this time. St. Mark tells us, in his short account of the Resurrection of our Lord, that He appeared first of all—except His Blessed Mother—‘to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven devils.’ It seems hardly probable that this dispossession could have taken place after the incident before us, of which we commonly speak as the conversion of the Magdalene. It must, therefore, have been before this time, and it is natural to think that great gratitude for the favour thus bestowed upon her may have been one of the motives which brought this delivered soul to the feet of our Lord, on this occasion of the meal in the house of the Pharisee. If we put the fact of her dispossession by the side of the epithet used of her by St. Luke, who says that she was ‘a sinner,’ it seems further natural to think that her having been under the power of the evil spirits may have been connected with her sin. It has indeed been thought by some, that the devils from which she had been delivered were no other than the seven deadly sins. But this is hardly in harmony with the usual language of the Evangelists, when they speak of demoniacs. There were often cases of possession, in which the possessed person had not merited the infliction by any sin, but ordinarily, perhaps, there may have been some such cause for the permission granted to the devils to afflict them in that way. In the case of Magdalene we are told that she had been possessed, and also that she had been a sinner, and it is not very important whether the possession from which she had been delivered by our Lord was or was not the direct punishment of her sin.

At the time she meets us first, Mary Magdalene is neither a demoniac nor under the influence of sin.

How she came into this happy state of penitence is hidden from us in the Gospel narratives. The contemplations of devout souls, and indeed certain unauthenticated traditions, whether among Christian or Jewish writers, have endeavoured to fill up the picture which St. Luke and St. Mark have left in the simplest outline. To some she is one who had a pious sister, devoted to the service of our Lord, who for a long time could not induce this gay child of pleasure to hear His teaching, but at last succeeded, and was thus able to bring her to a better mind. Certainly it helps us to understand and make more real to ourselves the conditions under which the preaching of our Lord was carried on, if we allow ourselves the harmless liberty of surrounding Him with the circumstances and classes of persons who gather in all days round the preaching of a great teacher of morals or religion, especially if he speaks with authority, if his words are prospered by the influence of grace on the hearts of his hearers, and if any miraculous confirmation has been vouchsafed to add to his authority. It cannot be doubted that, in the case of this marvellous preaching of our Divine Lord, Who spake as never man spake before or since, on Whom all the forces of nature or of the spiritual world waited, as on their Lord, Whose words were with power, and could unlock the hardest of hearts to the superabundant streams of grace which accompanied His Ministry, there were all the circumstances which are to be found occasionally in the ministrations of His favoured servants. No doubt His progress through the country was a triumphal procession, with occasional interruptions of malignity and of deadness to His word, and the good and pious souls, of whom there was no lack in the nation, especially after the preaching of St. John Baptist, would naturally gather round Him, and create a move-

ment on every side, apart even from that which was directly produced by His own personal influence. So there would be there, not one Martha, such as she is pictured for us in the contemplations of which we are speaking, anxious to beat up recruits for the audience of the Divine Teacher and Physician of souls, and above all anxious to bring her own wayward sister within the range of His influence, but a score of such enthusiastic and devoted canvassers for the cause of God.

Thus it is no unlikely imagination, that many persons may have been almost forced into hearing our Lord preach, by some such opportunity as that which now labours so hard to induce Protestants to hear some famous missioner, or to attend at High Mass, or at a Procession of the Blessed Sacrament, that, as was said of St. Peter at Jerusalem, at least the shadow, or rather the light, of the Sacramental Presence of our Lord may fall on some of them. All this is conjecture. It would seem from the incident, of which St. Luke here gives us the narrative, that Magdalene had to find her own way into the presence of our Lord, and this seems to imply that she had not as yet made the acquaintance of any one who might have helped her in her desire to show her gratitude to Him. We have not as yet heard of the band of holy women who are presently to be mentioned by St. Luke, in connection with Magdalene herself, who accompanied our Lord on His journeys, ministering to His wants and to those of the Apostles, and also, no doubt, preparing women for conversion, or for Baptism, or for direct interviews with our Lord, which must have been very difficult for them under the circumstances of that society. Hanging on the outskirts of every religious movement there are always a number of lonely unfriended souls, persons who have gone in to hear a sermon or into a church by chance, and hid themselves when so doing from their

own friends and home circle, afraid to be seen by those who are familiar with the carelessness or the misery of their life, hearts wounded already by the shaft of contrition, and only waiting for an occasion to give them courage to go for themselves, where so many others have gone without fear, there to unburthen their miseries, and be set free. Then what seems a chance word, or some stroke of grace, or some sudden Providential benefit or warning, pierces them to the quick, and they can no longer delay, and they make their way to peace unaided, save by the powerful grace of God. Such is constantly the history of precious conversions, whether to the faith or to a better life.

Thus it seems that the most reasonable conjecture we can make concerning this blessed penitent, is that her presence in the house of Simon was owing to her gratitude for the favour she had already received from our Lord of being delivered from the power of seven devils. This perhaps can hardly have been the case, unless she had had some one to lead her in the first instance to Him, on one of those occasions on which He was so lavish of the exercise of His miraculous power. Even this is not certain, for the demoniacs mentioned in the Gospel are not in all cases brought to our Lord. But those who are like Magdalene are apt to outrun the expectations and even the advice of those good friends who have been the first to introduce them to our Lord. Martha's work may have ceased when her sister was delivered. She would not, perhaps, have counselled the display of devotion of which we are to hear the history. But Magdalene only knew that she had a debt of gratitude to pay, and if she had been healed in a crowd, as might have been the case, for example, with those who were dispossessed when the messengers of St. John were present, not long

before this incident of the meal at the Pharisee's house, she might have had no opportunity of making her personal acknowledgments to her deliverer. In the meantime she had entered more deeply into herself, and had learnt, in the light of an awakened conscience, to loathe her old bad ways. To what extent she had fallen the Gospel narrative does not inform us, and we must not press too far the word used of her by St. Luke, that she was a sinner. We must not press it too far, for this reason—that it is the glory and the prerogative of the blessed Magdalene to have been the first, as far as we are told in the Gospels, to have come to our Lord as a sinner and as nothing else. She was not a paralytic or a blind or deaf or dumb person, she had now no bodily ailment or affliction, of the healing of which she was in search, and so, as others are described as coming or being brought to our Lord as lepers, or as having the palsy, or any other disease or affliction, she is described simply as coming to our Lord afflicted with the malady of sin. This is enough to explain the use of the word sinner in St. Luke, and there is no necessity at all to conclude from it that he means us to understand that she was a sinner of the lowest and most shameful class of sinful women. On the other hand, there are many circumstances in her story, which must be taken as a whole as it is told in the various passages in the Gospels in which she is mentioned, which lead us to the conclusion that she was of good birth, a person of rank, as well as wealthy.

It is not easy to see how she could have found admission into the house of the Pharisee, if she had belonged to the lowest class of infamous women. The servants could not have known her as such. We find her, almost immediately after this incident, associated in the service of our Lord with noble and virtuous ladies,

and the work on which she was engaged was one which, we may suppose, would not have been entrusted to any whose character was tarnished. She was known to the Pharisee as what he called a sinner, and Pharisees, modern as well as ancient, call all worldlings by that name, and she was what St. Luke calls a sinner, in the sense which we have already explained. This is all we know, and there is considerable internal evidence in the account of her in the Gospel of St. Luke in favour of the view that she was herself the authority from whom the Evangelist drew his narrative of the incident. If this was so, it is only in harmony with the manner in which the saints of God ordinarily speak of themselves, if she has put the worst words that could be used of herself into the history. As all such narratives in the Gospel have been constantly used by preachers to enforce great truths, it has frequently happened that there can be found a great number of writers who have taken the worst possible view of the words used concerning the persons who are in any way held up to blame in the history. It is curious, in the case of the blessed Magdalene, that the traditional view concerning her is not uniform, and this can hardly be accounted for by the wish of Christian writers to cast as few aspersions of a disgraceful character as possible on those who are venerated as saints. St. Mary of Egypt and St. Margaret of Cortona are among the saints of the Church, and the glory of God is increased by such conversions, and such lives after conversion, as theirs. But the glory of God does not require that the most famous of penitents should have sinned the most deeply, but only that such should have the most perfect contrition for whatever sins they may have committed.

Thus it seems most probable that, what the exact extent of the sins of this blessed penitent was, we shall never truly

know till the day when the secret lives and thoughts of all hearts shall be revealed in the presence of the Judge of all, in order that God may be fully glorified for His dealings with each one of His creatures. In the meantime it is open to us to consider her in whatever way seems most in accordance with our actual knowledge concerning her, and with the light that is thrown upon her by the words of our Lord and the Pharisee, whether this leads us to look on her as a wayward frivolous child of voluptuous self-indulgence, who had committed many follies and been guilty of many acts of worldliness and dissipation, after which she had been allowed by the Providence of God to become possessed, and who had then been delivered from the Evil One by the mercy of our Lord, at no great distance of time from that of the scene related in the text, or as one who had thrown aside all shame in her life of pleasure, and made herself notorious as an abandoned woman in the commonest sense of the word. The balance of evidence, which after all is chiefly inferential, seems certainly to incline to a conclusion short of this last extreme.

Whatever may have been the previous life and condition of this great Saint, it is certain that when she came to our Lord her heart was overflowing with penitential love. It certainly cannot be considered a baseless conjecture, that she had heard the gracious words about coming to Him which He had addressed so shortly before to the crowd in general. She had thus two dominant feelings in her heart—gratitude for the favour of her deliverance from the power of the devil, and deep contrition for her sins. And hearing our Lord invite those who were labouring and burthened to come to Him, she acted, as she always acts in the Gospel history, with the highest and the simplest prudence, while she seemed to be obeying a strong impulse

only. St. Luke tells us that when she heard where our Lord was, she came, as if to imply that it mattered not to her where she was to find Him, so long as she did find Him. She made her way into the room in which He was sitting or reclining at meat in the Pharisee's house. The words by which St. Luke signifies her knowledge of the place in which our Lord was to be found, seem to imply that she had sought for the information at the cost of some pains. She would go at once to Him Who promised rest and refreshment to the soul. 'Having ascertained, she went.' It was not simply to go to Him, it was to perform an act of homage and thanksgiving and devotion. She took her alabaster box with her, and she must have intended from the first to make that use of it which she did. Our Lord afterwards said of her, 'What she had, she hath done.'

Magdalene could not have known the appropriateness of her action, as our Lord afterwards drew it out in His words to the Pharisee, for she could not have known that, when the Master entered the house of Simon, the common courtesies paid to guests would not be offered to Him by His host. God was ever on the watch, if we may say so, to render honour to our Lord, in a special way, when ordinary honour had been denied Him, and the instances in which this rule of Providence is illustrated in the Gospel history are among the most beautiful of its incidents. On this occasion, Magdalene was to be the instrument used by God. So now the poor child of self-indulgence and of the world, as she had once been, was sent, among other things, to render to our Lord, in the most conspicuous and magnificent way, the honour which had been denied Him. His feet had not been washed, as was but the usual courtesy, and now this loving penitent stood behind Him, having glided into the room without hindrance from any. But before she could use her oint-

ment, the fountains of the great deep of her contrition and devotion were broken up, and the tears that streamed from her eyes became a flood in which she could bathe the feet of her Saviour and Lord. For so it often is, even when we have been dry and devoid of feeling before, an act of humiliation or devotion or charity brings to the heart an overwhelming might of tenderness, and the sweet tears flow in abundance. It cannot be thought that she had no other means of wiping our Saviour's feet than the hair of her head, but she loosed down her crown of beautiful locks, which perhaps, in the days of her sin, had been her great glory and ornament, and she made them serve the office of a towel to wipe the feet which her tears had washed. At the same time, her devotion and courage increasing as she went on, for she had received no check from our Lord, and she cared little for what others might think or do, she flung herself on the feet before her and covered them with kisses. Lastly, she took the ointment from her box of alabaster and shed it upon the feet which she had been kissing. No one interrupted her—no one seems even to have spoken. The action was swiftly performed, and in a few moments she had anointed our Lord. The deed was all her own—no example had suggested it, no heart but hers could have conceived it. There is in it a tenderness, a boldness, a lavishness, and also a humility all unique. We may infer from the words of our Lord to the Pharisee, in which He draws the contrast between Magdalene and him, that the natural order would have been for her to wash His feet and then anoint His head. ‘Thou gavest Me no water for My feet, but she with tears hath washed My feet, and with her hairs she hath wiped them. Thou gavest Me no kiss, but she, since she came in, hath not ceased to

kiss My feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint, but she with ointment hath anointed My feet.' Thus did this blessed penitent fill up, in her glorious way, the lack of observance on the part of the host who had invited our Lord, in all but one thing. She did not venture now to shed even her precious ointment on His sacred Head, but poured it all out on His feet. Our Lord understood all that she did, and saw in it at once the reparation to His honour and the loving contrition from which it proceeded.

This, however, was not yet to be manifested by our Lord. The whole action had passed swiftly and in silence. Our Lord Himself said nothing, but left her to perform her homage of love without either encouragement or reproof. The Apostles were not present, as it seems—many who invited our Lord could not burthen themselves with the entertainment of so large a company. The guests, the servants, the Pharisee himself, said nothing. But if there was silence of words, there was not silence of thoughts. Any incident of devotion and religious earnestness, passing beyond the bounds of ordinary manifestation, is certain to awake a sort of alarmed criticism. There may have been some there who shared her enthusiasm for our Lord, and were rejoiced to see Him honoured. To many of the guests she may have been known as well as to the host himself, and they would wonder at seeing such a person at the feet of Jesus Christ. As men said once, 'Is Saul also among the prophets?' so they might have said to themselves, 'And is Mary of Magdala among the women who believe in this new Prophet?' But in the heart of the Pharisee who had invited our Lord, the criticism was rather for our Lord Himself than for the poor penitent who was thus honouring Him. 'And the Pharisee who had invited Him, seeing it, spoke within himself, saying,

‘This Man, if He were a prophet, would know surely who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth Him, that she is a sinner.’

These words of the Pharisee seem to show his state of mind, as if he were seeking unconsciously for arguments, for or against the claims of our Lord to be considered a Prophet. He was in that stage of mental progress towards the truth, at which the thoughts naturally turn to the one question which must be solved before all others, and find in everything that takes place some evidence one way or the other. If this had not been so, there was much that was beautiful and touching in the scene to attract him, that we may hope he would have found some other comment in his heart than a simple criticism of the kind which he made. It reveals, in the first place, a misconception of the prophetic office, and of the duty of messengers of God to those to whom they are sent. For it was not an inherent characteristic of the prophetic office that such messengers should always know the state of the soul of those who came to them. The gift of reading the heart was imparted to the prophets partially, and on such occasions as it pleased God to impart it. Nor could this poor Pharisee understand that one who had once been a sinner, even a notorious sinner, need not therefore be shut out from all hope of penitence, or that there was a peculiar joy in the Heart of our Lord, and indeed of all lovers of souls, in the return of sinners to God, which would make such a person, as he supposed Magdalene to be, especially welcome to Him. He understood nothing of the condescension of the Sacred Heart, but he might have known that God is full of mercy, that, as our Lord reminded other Pharisees more than once, He had declared that He preferred mercy to sacrifice, and that, moreover, this despised girl was putting himself to shame

by her rendering to our Lord the offices which he, in his want of courtesy, had denied Him. The whole interior of the Pharisee reveals to us that narrow and cavilling spirit which leads to the vice which our Lord speaks of as the evil eye; the readiness to see what is liable to blame in our neighbour, sometimes even in the works of God, while we are not ready to see what is praiseworthy and beautiful, though it is far more conspicuous than the other, in the persons or incidents which arouse our criticism. It is the habitual temper with which Protestants look on the Catholic Church and her children, and with which worldly and narrow-minded men look on the exercise of such virtues as generosity, devotion, enthusiasm, and the like. The man could not have been without his good qualities, and he may not have been very far from the Kingdom of God, but his narrowness and hardness of heart were ruffled by the action, both of the penitent in her display of devotion, and of our Lord in not rebuking that display. But now our Lord is about to speak, and we may here divide our consideration of the incident, passing, in the next chapter, to the manner in which He dealt both with Magdalene and with her critics.

CHAPTER XX.

The Pardon of Magdalene.

St. Luke vi. 36—50; *Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 55.

THE Pharisee, as has been said, had not uttered a word in expression of his thoughts concerning Magdalene and his own blessed Guest, Who had received her demonstration of loving homage without reproof. But our Lord, in His infinite tenderness and generosity, would not let even a thought of such petty criticism pass without its correction, both that He might defend the despised woman and help His host on to a better understanding of His own Divine charity. He answered the thought of his heart before it found expression in words, and so showed him in the most convincing manner that it was not from any want of knowledge of the condition of the poor penitent that He had allowed her to approach Him and treat Him with so much of love and reverence. ‘And Jesus answering said to him, Simon, I have something to say to thee.’ The words were full of friendliness and courtesy, as if asking his leave, before He lifted for him the veil which hung over his heart. ‘But he answered, Master, say it.’ And then our Lord put to him a simple parable, in order that what there was to be of rebuke to him might sound less sharp, by being made general, and that he might also have no opportunity of evading the force of the parallel which he had himself first admitted. ‘A certain creditor had two

debtors, the one owed him five hundred pence, the other fifty. And whereas they had not wherewith to pay, he forgave them both. Which therefore of the two loved him most?’

It may have been very far from the thoughts of the Pharisee Simon, that he was himself figured in one of these debtors, and that the other was the woman kneeling still behind our Lord as He spake, with her lips still fastened on the sacred Feet, which she had bathed in her tears. But there may have been a sort of fear that something was in store which he did not expect. He answers as a man who feels not quite sure of his ground. ‘Simon answering said, I suppose that he to whom he forgave most.’ And our Lord, Who now had from his own lips the truth which He desired to enforce, and of which Simon could not now complain, as he had himself declared it, ‘said to him, Thou hast rightly judged.’ Up to this time He had taken no outward notice of the woman behind His feet. He had allowed her homage and service, and His Sacred Heart had rejoiced over her, as one even then most dear to Him, and after this time to become ever more and more dear and rich in His grace, and He had been applying to her, in copious streams, the abundant graces which were required to perfect her conversion and her contrition. And now at last He turned to her. In turning He must have disengaged His feet from her embrace, and she may then have stood before Him, her eyes fixed on the ground, her tears still flowing, her face flushed with love and grief. ‘And turning to the woman, He said to Simon, Dost thou see this woman?’ Not a word from Him about her former life or state, but what Simon so little expected, a comparison between her service to Himself and that of His host. ‘I entered into thy house’—perhaps Simon had thought that he was the

person who conferred the obligation when he admitted our Lord to his table, but our Lord's words have a significance to us when we remember His Divine Majesty and the dignity of His Sacred Human Nature —I, the Incarnate God, the King of men and angels, the Saviour of the world, I entered into thy house ! ‘Thou gavest Me no water for My feet ; but she with tears hath washed My feet, and with her hairs hath wiped them. Thou gavest Me no kiss, but she, since she came in, hath not ceased to kiss My feet. My Head with oil thou didst not anoint, but she with ointment hath anointed My feet. Wherefore, I say to thee, her many sins are forgiven her because she hath loved much, but to whom less is forgiven, he loveth less.’

Every word of this short speech must have burnt into the heart of him to whom it was addressed. The Pharisee could not have expected to have himself so plainly and pointedly attacked in the presence of his guests, and yet he had brought it upon himself, and he could not but feel at the same time the tenderness with which our Lord dealt with him. When our Lord undertakes the defence of any one with whom fault is found, He does it in a way which involves a rebuke to the person whose criticism He is answering. Thus the main purport of what our Lord said was a contrast between Simon and Magdalene, to the great advantage of the latter. She had supplied in an overabundant manner every deficiency in the courtesy and homage of the Pharisee. Instead of the water for the feet, which it was common to refuse to no one, she had given the tears of her eyes. Instead of the towels to wipe the feet, she had given the hairs of her head. Instead of the oil which might have been shed on the head of the honoured Guest, she had lavished the far more precious

ointment on His feet. Instead of the usual kiss of peace, which it seems almost inconceivable that Simon should not have offered to our Lord, she had continued kissing His feet from the moment she came into the room. But our Lord made no complaint of Simon—He only proved to him, by his own standard that the woman loved more than he, because she had had more forgiven her, or that she had a right to have more forgiven to her, because she had loved so much. It is beyond question that the love of which our Lord speaks, is the love that was manifested by her actions, as the lesser love of Simon had been manifested by the comparatively few signs of honour or affection which he had shown. In another case, the greater demonstration of love might have been considered as showing greater gratitude for other benefits, not simply that of the remission of a debt. But the Pharisee, in his thoughts, had chosen, as it were, this ground for the comparison, when he had said to himself that our Lord could not be a Prophet, otherwise He would have known the sort of person who approached Him, for she was a sinner. So our Lord took up his own thoughts in speaking to him. All sin is a debt to the justice of God, and the Pharisee, whether he thought so or not, was a debtor in this sense to our Lord. He had shown but little love to his benefactor, therefore it is probable he had less reason for showing gratitude. But the Magdalene had shown great love. Her love was a mark, not so much of the magnitude of her sins in themselves, but of the magnitude of the benefit which she had received when they were forgiven. ‘As your actions show,’ our Lord seems to say, ‘that you have had few sins forgiven, her actions show that if she has had many sins, she has had them forgiven.’

Thus far our Lord had only spoken of the Magdalene

to the Pharisee, and He had taken no notice of all she had done except to defend her. But now it was her turn, and our Lord at length let His eyes fall upon her, and He addressed her directly. ‘And He said to her, Thy sins are forgiven thee. And they that sat at meat with Him began to say within themselves, Who is this that forgiveth sins also? And He said to the woman, Thy faith hath made thee safe. Go in peace.’ These words of our Lord to the Magdalene, conveying to her the precious assurance of her full forgiveness, may perhaps have been to some extent suggested by the thoughts of the Pharisee concerning her, as the Parable of the Two Debtors was certainly suggested by them. That is, our Lord may have declared to her her perfect absolution, in the same way as He had before done the same thing to the paralytic who had been let down from the roof before Him, his bearers thinking rather of the cure of the body than of the healing of the soul. But it is more likely that, in these words also, our Lord answered her own thoughts and desires, for her whole action was at once an outpouring of grateful love, and a petition for still further remission. The very action itself must have had the character of a supplication for forgiveness, for she was known to those who saw what she did, she was known as a person whom they could call a sinner, our Lord was known as a preacher of penitence, and thus when she was seen at His feet it was a public declaration that she was asking of Him peace and reconciliation with God. The words of our Lord are couched in a declaratory form, but they were understood by those who heard them as conveying, and not simply declaring, pardon, for ‘this they said within themselves, Who is this that forgiveth sins also?’ It is most probable therefore that our Lord in these words gave her the boon which she had come there to ask, by her

actions rather than by her words. And when He added, ‘Thy faith hath saved thee, or made thee safe,’ it is natural to think that she must have had in her heart, not only the general faith that He was a Prophet sent from God, but the particular faith which corresponded to the boon which she received, and that must have been the faith that He had power to forgive her her sins. This faith must have nearly, if not quite, reached the level of the faith which St. Peter was afterwards to profess in his own name and in the name of his brethren, that ‘our Lord was the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ And when He bade her go in peace, or as the Greek text has it, ‘Go into peace,’ the words seem to signify that she had gained that for which she came, she had received the boon she had desired and sought, that her work for the time was accomplished, and she might now withdraw herself from the gaze of all these guests and servants, carrying in her heart the ineffable boon of the peace of a conscience perfectly reconciled to the Master Whom she had grievously offended. She was soon enough to be with our Lord again, and indeed to become a constant attendant on His Person, but for the present occasion she had done enough and might go away in thankfulness and joy, to begin a new life, the great characteristic of which was to be peace with God and herself, instead of the excitement and remorse and continual interior struggles of the life of pleasure and dissipation out of which she had come. And here we might leave this blessed penitent, were it not that the words of our Blessed Lord to her have been the subject of so much discussion among Catholic writers, and of discussion of that kind which it is most profitable to examine, on account of the many truths which come up in the course of the argument.

There has, as has been said, been considerable differ-
y 36

ence of opinion among Catholic interpreters, as to the exact meaning of the words in which our Lord here spoke of the forgiveness of the sins of this blessed penitent, and almost every possible interpretation has been affixed to them by some one of the Fathers. But the discrepancy is more apparent than real, and it has probably arisen from the seeming difficulty created by the assignment, by our Lord, of the great love shown by the Magdalene as the reason of her forgiveness. All of the interpretations contain some Catholic truth, and the only question for us is how to adjust the meaning of the words so as to agree in the best way with the occasion on which they were spoken. But it will be useful first to remind ourselves of the meaning of the words 'remission' and 'forgiveness,' and of other cognate expressions in the Sacred Scriptures and in the language of the Church. In our Lord's own mouth, and in Sacred Scripture generally, these words have a fulness of meaning which they have not always with ourselves, inasmuch as the imperfection of the dispositions, in which pardon or absolution may be validly received, may sometimes prevent the actual application of forgiveness and remission, in a particular case, in that large and comprehensive extent of which they are capable.

The remission of sins, in Sacred Scripture, is the effect of the application to the soul, by way of forgiveness, of the precious Blood of Jesus Christ and the Sacrifice of the Cross. It cannot be questioned that the power of the merits of the Passion extends to every one of the various effects of sin on the soul. That is, the natural—so to speak—effect of the application of the precious Blood to the soul, is the cancelling of all the guilt, of all the weakness consequent on evil acts or habits, of all the estrangement from God and consequent difficulty of intercourse with Him which results from in-

dulgence, and of all the pain due to the sins which are thus washed away. We are accustomed to distinguish between the cancelling of the guilt of sin and the cancelling of the pain due to sin, and the distinction is most true and entirely founded on the facts of the case, and the language of Scripture and of the Church. But our Lord's words always mean all that they can mean, and when He says, 'Thy sins are forgiven thee,' He means—unless there is some reason for thinking the contrary—that the whole effects of sin as well as its guilt are cancelled and removed. And if He uses the words in any case where there is reason to think that the guilt of sin has been already removed, before the words are spoken by Him, then His words mean a confirmation of the truth that the guilt has been removed, and a further removal of anything that remains to be removed, that is, in many cases, of the pain due to sins already forgiven as to their guilt. Our Lord does not use one word for the forgiveness of guilt, and another for the removal of the penalties due to sin. Nor does the Church, or Sacred Scripture, use different words for these two effects. When David cries out in his Psalm of Penance, 'Wash me yet more from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin,'¹ he has already had the guilt of his sin remitted, but it would be presumptuous to say that he was thinking only of the remission of pain. He prays for fuller and fuller forgiveness in every kind. When Sacred Scripture records that Judas Machabeus sent money to Jerusalem that sacrifice should be offered for the sins of the dead, adding, 'It is therefore a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead, that they may be loosed from sins,'² it is clear, from the Catholic doctrine, that the prayers were made for the remission of pain only. The same is to be said of the language of

¹ Psalm l. 4.

² 2 Mach. xii. 46.

the Church, which prays for the remission of sins for the faithful departed, and puts into the mouths of her children, when standing by the death-bed of a soul already fled, words like these: *Quæ per fragilitatem
humanae conversationis peccata commisit, tu venia misericordissimæ pietatis absterge, per Christum Dominum nostrum.* That is, both the Church and Sacred Scripture use the words remission, and the like, for whatever application of the precious Blood is possible in the case before them, whether of the guilt of mortal sin, or the guilt of venial sin, or of the penalties due to sin or any of its effects. And they may use the word of one of these things, or of all these things together, according to the meaning which the case admits of. For the difference between the effect produced by the application of the merits of the Passion in any two or three cases, is not in the power of the Precious Blood itself, but only in the dispositions of the soul to which the remitting power is applied, whether sacramentally or otherwise. And it is possible also that when it is said that a sin shall not be remitted or is not remitted, such declarations may apply either to the whole effect of what is called remission, or to one of its effects, as when a sin already forgiven as to its guilt is not left without temporal punishment, whether on account of the dispositions of the sinner or of the requirements of God's just government of the world, which sometimes make Him publicly avenge a crime which is still not beyond the range of remission as to guilt.

If we turn especially to the language of the New Testament, and examine those passages in which the words which signify remission are used by our Lord, this remark will be further enforced. We might naturally expect that our Lord would not limit the meaning of the words in which He conveys the application of His own

great work for the redemption of mankind, but there are places in which He seems to recognize the twofold sense in which that application might be made. When He bids us, in His own prayer, pray that our trespasses may be forgiven as we forgive others, He uses the full sacramental word. On the two great occasions on which He publicly forgave sins, that is, on the occasion of the healing of the paralytic who was let down through the roof into the middle of the house where He was teaching, and on this occasion of the forgiveness of the Magdalene, He uses the full word again. But there are more than one places in the Gospels in which the words seem to refer, in our Lord's mouth, to the remission of pain in particular, and we cannot ever be certain that He does not, at least, include this, or speak of this where there is no guilt to be remitted. It may therefore be concluded that if there is reason for thinking that, in any particular passage, He speaks mainly of one effect rather than of the other, it is fair so to understand the words, even though the case should require that the meaning should be rather of the lesser than of the greater remission. For the remission of pain is certainly a lesser application of the Precious Blood than the remission of guilt, or than the remission of both guilt and pain at the same time. And thus if it were necessary, in the passage before us, to understand that the blessed Magdalene was already forgiven as to the guilt of her sins, when she approached our Lord in the house of the Pharisee, it would not be inconsistent with the usage of Scripture to consider that the words of our Lord addressed to her were meant mainly to apply to the remission of the pain due to her sins, that is, to assure her of her full and perfect forgiveness.

There are as many as three interpretations of the words of which we are speaking, which have the sanction

of the names of great Fathers, though they do not occur in the passages of those Fathers' writings in which they are directly expounding the text before us. St. Augustine³ is quoted as understanding the passage in the plain and simpler sense of the words, that is, the sense in which the reason which our Lord assigns as the ground of the forgiveness of this woman's sins, her great love, is considered as being the cause of her forgiveness. She loved much, her whole conduct after she entered the house of the Pharisee is one continued display of great love, and a display of this love in the eyes of the world, which was certain to criticize her in the most ill-natured way, and by that love, which was founded on her faith in our Lord as the Saviour and Redeemer of mankind, and as having the power to forgive her her sins, she has earned from Him that forgiveness which was in truth what she had sought. St. Augustine does not enter into the question, whether she was already justified when she approached the feet of our Lord. But he takes it for granted that her love, as shown by her conduct, on which our Lord dwells in His words to the Pharisee as the proof of her love, was the cause and ground of the forgiveness which she then and there received, without drawing any distinction between the remission of guilt and the remission of pain. After St. Augustine comes the great name of St. Ambrose,⁴ who interprets the words of our Lord as if the love which the Magdalene showed was the ground of her forgiveness in this other sense—that our Lord forgave her, because He foreknew what a great lover of His she was to become. But it must be remembered that St. Ambrose is not here directly commenting on the passage of St. Luke. St. Gregory the Great⁵ is the authority for

³ St. Aug. *Hom. 25*, inter 50.

⁴ St. Amb. *'De Tobia'*, c. 22.

⁵ St. Greg. *Ep. 1*, vi. 22.

another class of interpretation, in which the great love shown by the Magdalene is not so much the reason for which she has been forgiven, as the evidence that she has been forgiven, as if our Lord had said to Simon, ‘It is certain that this woman has been forgiven more sins than yourself, for she has shown me an abundance of loving homage which you have not shown.’ In this interpretation the love is caused by the forgiveness, and is its evidence. In the others the love is the cause of the forgiveness, though St. Ambrose thinks that the forgiveness is granted for the love which is to follow it, and St. Augustine thinks it is granted for the love which preceded it.

There are other ways of explaining the words of our Lord, such as that which has been already alluded to, by which the forgiveness of guilt is distinguished from the forgiveness of pain. Or another still, which rests on the truth that forgiveness and love may be simultaneous in the soul, and that it may be said in one sense that forgiveness engenders love, and in another sense that love engenders forgiveness. It is not the purpose of this commentary to discuss all possible opinions on the texts with which we have to deal, but rather to lay before the reader what seems, on the whole, the best interpretation. In the present case, however, it seems well to have departed from our usual custom and enumerated the chief at least among the interpretations. Turning to the question of the direct meaning of our Lord, it may be remembered in the first place that that meaning must be gathered in great measure from the intention of our Lord in making the comparison, and also from what we may fairly presume to have been the intention of the blessed Magdalene in the action which occasioned both the tacit censure of the Pharisee and the answer of our Lord to his thoughts. In the first place, then, as to the

intention of the blessed Magdalene. From the words with which our Lord dismissed her from His presence, we have already gathered that she came to Him, not simply for the sake of venting her feelings of gratitude and devotion, but also with a desire to obtain that very boon which our Lord gave to her, namely, the remission of her sins. But it does not follow from this that her sins were not already, in great measure, cancelled by the love which burnt in her heart towards God and our Lord, and the deep contrition which she had conceived for having offended Him. The words, in which our Lord declares her forgiveness, do not exclude the truth that she was in a state of grace when she entered the room. He speaks of her faith having made her whole or safe. And her faith, of which He speaks, was not like the faith of those who came to Him to seek for miraculous cures, the faith simply that He had power to work such cures, but it must have been a faith that realised that He was the Son of God, and that He had power to heal the wounds of the soul as well as the diseases of the body. One who had such a faith, and who had moreover heard or been told of the sweet words of invitation in which He had bidden all that were burthened by sin to come to Him for refreshment, would need no more to induce her to do as she had done. It is true that if she had true charity, she was already in a state of grace, and so far her sins were already forgiven. But souls in such a state are the last in the world to say to themselves that they do not need to hear the gracious words of absolution pronounced by our Lord, or by some one who has authority on earth to forgive sins. We read the Gospels so continually, and so much without realizing to ourselves the state of mind into which the populations through which our Lord passed about, must have been thrown by His presence, that we are far indeed from being able to

enter into the thoughts and feelings of such persons as this glorious penitent. For the first time, as far as we know, for many centuries, the dead had been raised to life, and the other stupendous miracles of our Lord, combined with the power of His teaching, and the beauty of His character and example, produced a state of enthusiasm of which even the most fervent Catholics of our own day have but few experiences. It may be considered as certain, then, that the main object of this action on the part of the penitent was the obtaining from our Lord that which He gave her, something of the refreshment and rest which He had just before promised, even though she might not have been able to speak theologically about the forgiveness of her sins by absolution in the sense in which we now speak of it.

That she was burning with charity when she entered the room, who can doubt? and if this was the case then, theologically speaking, she had in her soul the grace of forgiveness. For such charity would be inconsistent with alienation from God. But it does not follow that our Lord did not confer on her an inestimable boon, in the way of forgiveness, when He said to her, 'Thy sins are forgiven thee,' or that He had not a most direct purpose in what He did. We have just now seen how He selected, as it were, the son of the poor widow of Naim as the subject of the great miracle by which He showed His power over death itself, for the purpose of His glory and for the manifestation of the truth concerning Himself. In the same way He may have chosen this incident of the Magdalene to reassert what He had already asserted once before, His power to forgive sins. It may be that for this Divine purpose He drew her by His silent and most powerful grace to His feet on that occasion. It cannot be doubted that every moment of the short minutes which were occupied by the incident before us

added immensely to the grace already in the heart of the Magdalene. Every moment was a fresh display of her love, rewarded by a fresh increase in grace and in her contrition and her love for our Lord. Her knowledge of Him would add, as it grew more and more clear, to her knowledge of herself, and so she would more and more deeply abhor her former state, for the sake of Him. In all these ways the work of grace would be going on in her soul, in deepening her grief for the sins of which she had before been conscious, in enlightening her as to the true character of much of which she had before thought lightly, till no nook or corner of her soul remained unilluminated by the light of Divine love, and unwashed by the sweet bitters of contrite grief. And, as the floods of her sorrowing love mounted higher and higher, she would draw more and more near to that state of most perfect contrition, in which the pains as well as the guilt of all sins are overwhelmed. And even then, how can it be supposed that the gracious words of the Incarnate Son of God, in whose Blood alone was there remission of sins, of any kind or degree, pronouncing her sins to be forgiven, would not confer immense additional grace on the soul, on which so many glorious gifts had already been lavished? For the holy words of sacramental absolution cannot be thought to produce no effect at all on a soul already contrite, though the forgiveness of sin may have already been obtained without them. It cannot be but they must add fresh grace of enlightenment and strength and health, even though they were not absolutely necessary, except by precept, for the complete forgiveness of sin.

This we may consider to have been the history of the soul of this great model of penitence in the scene of which we are speaking. If we turn to our Lord's part in the incident, and venture to inquire what may have been His motive

in the ordering of the whole scene, we must in the first place remember that He may have had one object in view in permitting the action of the penitent, and another in the vindication of her which He addressed to the criticism of the Pharisee. We do not of course know what had already passed between Him and the blessed Mary. We know that He had cast out of her seven devils, and this may probably have been at no great distance of time from this incident in the house of Simon. Whether she had been brought to Him for the purpose of instruction, or for the correction of the disorders of her life, whatever they may have been, we do not know. But He may have wished to draw her by His grace to this public demonstration of her penitence and devotion to Him, for many reasons connected with the welfare of her own soul. It would be altogether out of keeping with the noble and generous character of this holy woman to have been backward or sparing in her desire to make her gratitude known to all, and to let all whom she had before scandalised be witnesses of her humiliation and conversion. Our Lord might desire to permit this, in order to make her break more entirely with the world to which she had before been too deeply attached, and certainly nothing could more completely separate her from all her former ways and associates than this public display of her repentance. Holy writers have often dwelt on this in their meditations on this act of her life, remarking that to break with the world once and for ever, by some decided step of penitence and humiliation, is the most prudent measure that can be adopted by souls that are strong enough for it, and whose case requires some heroic remedy of this kind.

Again, our Lord might have prompted her to this act of public penance, on account of its perfect adaptation and correspondence, so to say, of the faults which she had

committed and which were probably well known. Thus her penance is like those of which men of former centuries were more fond than the men of our own time—the humiliation, or the suffering, corresponding to the kind of sin by which God had been offended. She who had been the queen of revelries and vanities, proud of her beautiful person, her profuse crown of hair, her scents and ointment and brave apparel and display of wealth on her dress, she who had been waited on and admired, and at whose feet all the homage of voluptuous adoration had been paid, she, the delicate and refined, even in her sensuality and her passion, was now waiting, kneeling among the attendants on the feast, behind the feet of her Master, making public profession of her grief for sin, and using, to bathe the feet of her Saviour, the tears of those eyes which had before served for the gates of sin, and those hairs of her head on which so much adornment had been lavished, and which she had braided and perfumed that she might seem more attractive in the eyes of her worshippers. Every particular of her homage to our Lord has something about it of this character of reparation, of using for His honour what had before been used for the dishonour of God, and the degradation of her soul. Thus she becomes the first public penitent in the Catholic Church, and her self-humiliation may have been intensely delightful to our Lord, not only for its own sake, and for the treasures of grace which it enabled Him to shower upon her, but also as the type and foundation of thousands and thousands of such noble reparations to His honour, by which countless souls after her were to undo the evil of which they had been guilty, and give immense honour to Him and edification to the Church at large. Thus what may have been seen by His Divine eye to have been the best possible discipline for a soul which He desired to raise to so great a height of sanctity,

and to make the pattern and model of Christian penitence to the end of time, may also have been of unspeakable value, as opening to His children a manner of doing Him honour, and of repairing scandals which may have been given, of which they might have had no example in His lifetime but for the blessed Mary of Magdala. Afterwards He was to use her devotion to Him for another great example of the same order, and now He uses her for the instruction of the Church in the matter of public atonement for public sins.

It may also be considered that our Lord was always looking forward to the great sacraments which He was to leave behind Him in the Church, and seizing opportunities as they occurred for preparing the minds of men for the inestimable treasures which were to be stored up in those sacraments. We shall find Him, very soon after this, working two great miracles with reference to the ineffable love with which He has made Himself our food in the adorable Sacrament of the Altar. We have already seen Him, in the case of the miracle on the paralytic, preparing the minds of men for His love in the other great Sacrament of Penance. This incident of the penitence of Mary may be considered as an act of the same sort, arranged by our Lord in the Providence of His Father to bear fresh witness to His assertion of the power to forgive sins. Both the action of blessed Mary, and our Lord's part in the incident, have a bearing on the doctrine of the Sacrament of Penance, and we may understand our Lord's pronouncement of absolution on the penitent before Him, after she had performed her public satisfaction, as testifying to this truth. If she be considered as having given public scandal by her former life, she might now be made an example of what was afterwards to become a rule, the exaction of the reparation of the public scandal before the imparting of absolu-

lution. It need not be contended that she was not in a state of grace before the reparation was made, but it is still beautifully illustrative of the Catholic doctrine that our Lord should not, as a matter of fact, pronounce the words of absolution over her, or declare her publicly to be absolved, without the self-humiliation and avowal of her state, which He may not indeed have imposed upon her, but which may still have been suggested to her by inspirations which came from Him, in order that her case might present, to the Church for all ages, the perfect order of the restoration of a fallen soul.

What has now been said of our Lord's part in this scene of the penitence of Mary, and of His conduct therein as the Physician of the soul, and as the Founder of the Sacrament of Penance, might have been said, perhaps, if the Pharisee had never thought within himself what he did think concerning our Lord, and so suggested to Him the words in which He took up the cause, so to say, of the poor woman of whom Simon thought so lightly. But there is a part of our Lord's action in this matter which was certainly occasioned by the criticism of the Pharisee. Our Lord was ever ready to defend the objects of criticism, even mental, when the occasion presented itself, and no one is recorded as having so often been defended by Him as this blessed penitent, who always leaves her cause to Him without a word for herself. In this way our Lord was, as it were, bound by His own generosity and delicate gratitude for any honour that was done to Him, to take up her defence, and this even if He had had no other reason for speaking in answer to the cavils of Simon. And it must be considered that those cavils had a great effect in putting the remarks of our Lord in the shape in which we actually have them. If there had been no Pharisee to criticise, He might have simply given her the assurance of her pardon

and sent her away. He might still have said, ‘Thy sins are forgiven thee,’ but He would not have put the short parable of the two debtors before Simon, and He would not have drawn the comparison between his slender love and the magnificent devotion of Magdalene. She would still have loved much and have deserved that our Lord should say so of her. The comparison between Simon and Magdalene is forced on our Lord by Simon himself.

If we look upon our Lord’s answer to Simon in this light, it will be seen to have the same character of Divine courtesy and gentleness which is to be found in His answers to the same kind of criticism on other occasions like this. When He was found fault with for eating and drinking with publicans and sinners, He replied gently, that they that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. ‘I am not,’ He said, ‘come to call the just, but sinners to penance.’ The same thing is insinuated in His answer to the objection of the same kind, when He delivered the three parables of the lost sheep, the lost groat, and the prodigal son. He is more severe when others are found fault with, but when it is Himself Who is blamed He is not severe. Thus, even in the present case, His words tend to show that the woman was not so sinful as Simon supposed her to be, because she had already been forgiven her many sins. It was a question of a sinner after forgiveness, not before. Here He takes Simon as it were on his own valuation, and points out to him why it was clear that he could not have had so many sins forgiven him. He does this, indeed, in a way that implied a sort of complaint of his want of courtesy, but it is after all a humble and almost apologetic tone that He assumes. He is like the father of the prodigal in His own parable, who almost begs the pardon of the elder son for having welcomed the returning sinner with so many demonstrations of joy. ‘She has outdone

you,' He seems to say, 'in her marks of love for Me, but this is not to be wondered at, for I have done more for her in forgiving her sins than for you, for she had more sins for Me to forgive.' Thus, in His dealing with Simon the Pharisee, as well as in His treatment of the Magdalene, and in the arrangement of the whole incident for the benefit of the Church, we see the gracious wisdom and tender consideration which belong to the Sacred Heart.

CHAPTER XXI.

The first work of Magdalene.

St. Luke viii. 1—3; *Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 55.

As we are not certain of the city in which the anointing of our Lord by the blessed Magdalene took place, we cannot tell whether He was at the time residing for a few days at Capharnaum, or in the midst of one of His missionary circuits throughout Galilee, on which the greater portion of his time was now expended. St. Luke, however, places immediately after the account of this first anointing, and of the words of our Lord spoken on that occasion, the statement that after this 'it came to pass that He travelled afterwards'—the Greek word apparently signifying a period of time which began from this point—'through the cities and towns, preaching and evangelising the Kingdom of God, and the twelve with Him. And certain women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary, who is called Magdalene, out of whom seven devils were gone forth, and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others, who ministered unto Him

of their substance.' This circumstance must have been mentioned by the Evangelist as something worthy of note in the history, and perhaps it may have been a new feature in the ordinary practice of our Lord. If our Lord was followed about from place to place, as has often been said, by many who were more or less his regular followers, though not belonging to the particular body of the Apostles, who were now always with Him, it would naturally come to be necessary that there should be some organization for the case of women, who could not have been allowed to be mingled with the companies of men. This was the way in the companies who followed the preaching of St. Vincent Ferrer, as has been already mentioned in a former volume of this work. Here, however, St. Luke gives another reason for the presence of this holy company, on which it may be as well to make a few remarks.

It is obvious that when our Lord called the Apostles to that more continued companionship with Himself, which became a part of their life after their formal call to the Apostolate, and especially if they were from that time vowed or obliged to the observance of poverty, there must often have been considerably difficulty in providing for the maintenance of so large a body. It would also have been inconvenient for the Apostles to go about begging for sustenance, at a time when they were probably much occupied in instructing and preparing men for personal intercourse with our Lord, and perhaps for the reception of the Sacrament of Baptism. At the same time it might be inconvenient for the little villages and towns through which our Lord's course now lay, to be always charged with the maintenance of so many unexpected guests. Perhaps also it was not convenient on other grounds, to depend entirely on them, as the opposition to our Lord was now spreading and increasing in

activity, and we shall find Him, ere long, almost obliged to leave Galilee itself, and to keep with Him only the twelve Apostles. It may have been under such circumstances of convenience that this practice of the holy women following Him, and ministering to Him of their substance, sprang up, a custom apparently which was not likely to give any scandal, or to suggest any evil, among a population like that of Galilee. It came about naturally, as did the institute of the diaconate in the Church afterwards, that is, it was adopted by our Lord when the time came for it to be natural on account of the needs of the occasion. If it had been merely an accidental and temporary provision which was not to be the parent of anything like itself in the Church afterwards, it is not very likely that it would have been mentioned by St. Luke in this place. It seems certainly to have been continuous in the life of our Lord, as the women who followed him from Galilee and ministered unto Him are mentioned in the account of the Crucifixion, and we find some of the names which occur in this passage also prominent in the narrative of the sepulture and of the morning of the Resurrection. The time at which this circuit of Galilee, probably the last made by our Lord, took place was distant about a year and a half from the Passion. Thus if these ladies had remained more or less in constant attendance on our Lord, they must have formed a little community well knit together, and have been very familiar with His teaching.

The words of St. Luke only tell us that some of these holy women had been delivered from devils, and the first name that he gives is that of the blessed Magdalene, so called to distinguish her from the other Maries who are mentioned in the Gospels, our Blessed Lady, Mary Salome, and Mary the mother of James. This Mary might have been called Mary of Lazarus, or Mary of

Bethany, but at the time when she first joined our Lord's company she was in Galilee, where she was the possessor, either in her own right or by marriage, of the small town and estate of Magdalum. It is probable that at this time the family at Bethany was not yet known as such among the disciples. St. Luke mentions her as an instance of the dispossessions of which he speaks, and it may well be thought that her taking her place at once among the ladies trusted with the temporal provision for our Lord and the Apostles, throws some kind of light on her previous position. It is certain she must have been rich, and that in itself is an argument against the opinion which places her on the lowest rank of fallen women. She must have been one who could at once take her place by the side of Joanna and Susanna. Others of the company had been healed of 'infirmities,' and their gratitude, like that of the Magdalene, was permitted to show itself, in the first instance, by the laborious attendance on the wants of our Lord and His companions to which they devoted themselves. But although this may have been the occasion of the formation of this little community, it does not follow of necessity that these ladies did nothing more. We find Magdalene somewhat later than this, sitting at our Lord's feet, listening to His discourse, and it cannot be doubted that when our Lord was teaching, in public or in private, these chosen souls were among His most constant hearers. Another great object of this little body was probably to deal as intermediates between our Lord and the great numbers of their own sex and of children who might require particular instruction. This must have been difficult to His disciples on account of the great distance which was observed between the sexes in those times. The few words of St. Luke can thus be easily expanded, until they furnish us with the outlines of a very beautiful and

happy picture of these first ‘companions’ of Jesus Christ.

It would seem that this example in our Lord’s Life was followed in that of His Apostles. We know more of the life of St. Paul than of any of the others, and for good reasons connected with his special office as the Apostle of the Gentiles, St. Paul was one of those of the Apostolic band who did not allow of this practice in his own case. But he especially mentions, in his Epistle to the Corinthians,¹ in which he has to defend himself against the attacks of those who wish to put him on a lower level from the original Twelve, that he had a perfect right to be attended by a lady, as was done by St. Peter and other Apostles, just as he had a right to be supported by those to whom he preached, a right which, as he tells us, was the case in reference to that other just named, he waived for holy reasons of his own. He waived that other right just mentioned, that he might have the glory of serving our Lord at his own cost, working with his hands for his own maintenance. But we cannot doubt that St. Paul was guided to this resolution by an exquisite instinct of Christian and Apostolic prudence, seeing as he did the great danger which might arise in the Gentile communities unless he could show in his own person the most absolute disinterestedness. In truth, the very ground of the charge made against him, which implied that he had not the same authority as the older Apostles, was probably chosen in order to invalidate the great effect on the converts, and the Gentile world generally, of his great humility and entire independence of all temporal ends. This may have been one sufficient reason why St. Paul did not do as other Apostles, with regard to the services of devout ladies.

¹ 1 Cor. ix.

But it is also far from unlikely, that in a society so extremely corrupt as that of the Greek world in which St. Paul chiefly preached, where men also were familiar with the scandalous lives and professional impurities of the priestesses of the heathen worship, it would not have been edifying or free from scandal for the Apostle to travel about in company with a woman or with a number of women. But St. Paul seems to take care to witness to the lawfulness of the custom, to which he did not think it well to conform, and it is probable that we have in this practice of our Lord, and of the Apostles after Him, the beginning of the institutions of the early Church, in which so much use was made of widows and consecrated virgins, whether as deaconesses or otherwise. Further still, we may see in this holy practice the beginning of that great elevation of woman, which is the characteristic glory of the Christian religion, and the foundation, so to speak, on something in our Lord's own Life, of the marvellous and glorious services which women have rendered, and do still render, to the Christian community in so many various ways. It was well that the consecration of women should begin by active employment of the devout sex in works of zeal and charity for the support of the temporal needs of our Lord Himself, and that the other forms which were afterwards to be taken by female devotion, should, as it were, grow out of the original and highest privilege of ministering to no one less than Him.

It is also worthy of remark that we have here a third stage, as it may be called, in the life of the blessed Magdalene. We hear of her first at our Lord's feet, but we are told that before that she had been the slave of sin, and had had seven devils cast out of her. The second scene, then, in her life is the scene of which we have just had the account, the scene in the banquet-

chamber of Simon the Pharisee. But immediately after this we find her thus actively engaged in the service of our Lord and of the Apostles. We meet her next in the house at Bethany, where again she is at our Lord's feet, listening to His words. Thus she alternates between the life of active devotion and the life of quiet contemplation, for next after this we find her again anointing our Lord at the Supper at Bethany. It seems as if she were to be, to all times in the Church, not simply the pattern and model of penitents, who, after they have been pardoned, strive to wipe away their debt to God by hard and active labours for our Lord, nor simply the model of contemplative souls, leaving everything else for the sake of communion with God, but also the mother and model of the life which combines, or at least alternates, activity with contemplation, the part of Martha with that best portion which our Lord afterwards praised Mary herself for having chosen.

This service of our Lord and the Apostles in temporal matters, which was now begun by the blessed Magdalene and her associates, may very well be considered in the light of a continuation of that glorious action of hers of which we have just had to speak at length. For the washing of His sacred feet and the anointing them with her precious ointment, was a kind of personal service, a part of which, at all events, might have been supplied by the Pharisee who had invited him to share his hospitality. Nor can we doubt that the same spirit of loving gratitude, which made it so easy and delightful to this queen of penitents to sacrifice her own dignity, as it might have been said by her former friends, to the humiliation of a public service of a menial character to Him to Whom she owed so much, was the animating motive of all the services of the kind mentioned by St. Luke, as rendered henceforward by these holy ladies to our Lord and His

companions. From the washing of our Lord's feet in the house of Simon, to the continuous waiting upon Him and the Apostles for the purpose of supplying their temporal needs, would be a transition requiring no new motive. And this thought may help us to enter into the minds and affections of these first most blessed servants of our Lord in this kind of work. Magdalene and the others would look on each one of the numberless services of which their life was now made up, as an act of penitential and grateful love for our Lord's Sacred Person. And the countless women now consecrated in the Church to similar offices, in which our Lord and His Apostles are represented by the poor, the sick, by orphans, and children, and the afflicted in every kind of calamity, may find both encouragement and strength in the thought that they are walking along a path of life whose first professors were these dear personal friends of our Lord Himself.

APPENDIX.

Harmony of the Gospels as to the Second Period of the Public Life.

FROM THE ELECTION OF THE TWELVE APOSTLES TO THE CONVERSION
OF ST. MARY MAGDALENE.

§ 46.—*Choice of the Twelve Apostles.*

Mark iii. 13—19.

And going up into a mountain, He called unto Him whom He would Himself, and they came to Him. And He made that twelve should be with Him, and that He might send them to preach. And He gave them power to heal sicknesses, and to cast out devils. And to Simon He gave the name Peter, and James the son of Zebedee, and John the brother of James, and He named them Boanerges, which is, the sons of thunder. And Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew and Matthew, and Thomas, and James of Alphæus, and Simon the Cananæan, and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed Him.

Luke vi. 12—16.

And it came to pass in those days, that He went out into a mountain to pray, and He passed the whole night in the prayer of God. And when day was come, He called unto Him His disciples, and He chose twelve of them (whom also He named Apostles), Simon, whom He surnamed Peter, and Andrew his brother, James and John, Philip and Bartholomew, Matthew and Thomas, James the son of Alphæus, and Simon who is called Zelotes, and Jude the brother of James, and Judas Iscariot, who was the traitor.

§ 47.—*The Sermon on the Plain.*

PART THE FIRST.

Luke vi. 17—26.

And coming down with them, He stood in a place on a plain, and the company of His disciples, and a very

great multitude of people from all Judæa and Jerusalem, and the sea-coast both of Tyre and Sidon, who

Luke vi. 18—26.

were come to hear Him, and to be healed of their diseases. And they that were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. And all the multitude sought to touch Him, for virtue went out from Him, and healed all. And He, lifting up His eyes on His disciples, said,

Blessed are ye poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

Blessed are ye that hunger now, for you shall be filled. Blessed are ye that weep now, for you shall laugh.

Blessed shall you be when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you, and

shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of Man's sake. Be glad in that day and rejoice, for behold, your reward is great in heaven. For according to these things did their fathers to the prophets.

But wo to you that are rich, for you have your consolation.

Wo to you that are filled, for you shall hunger. Wo to you that now laugh, for you shall mourn and weep.

Wo to you when men shall bless you, for according to these things did their fathers to the false prophets.

§ 48.—*The Sermon on the Plain.*

PART THE SECOND.

Luke vi. 27—38.

But I say to you that hear, Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you. Bless them that curse you, and pray for them that calumniate you. And to him that striketh thee on the one cheek, offer also the other. And him that taketh away from thee thy cloak, forbid not to take thy coat also. Give to every one that asketh thee, and of him that taketh away thy goods, ask them not again. And as you would that men should do to you, do you also to them in like manner.

And if you love them that love you, what thanks are to you? for sinners also love

those that love them. And if you do good to them who do good to you, what thanks are to you? for sinners also do this. And if you lend to them of whom you hope to receive, what thanks are to you? for sinners also lend to sinners, for to receive as much.

But love ye your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing thereby, and your reward shall be great, and you shall be the sons of the Highest, for He is kind to the unthankful, and to the evil. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.

Luke vi. 37—38.

Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you shall be forgiven. Give, and it shall be given to you, good measure and pressed down

and shaken together and running over shall they give into your bosom. For with the same measure that you shall mete withal, it shall be measured to you again.

§ 49.—*The Sermon on the Plain.*

PART THE THIRD.

Luke vi. 39—49.

And He spoke also to them a similitude, Can the blind lead the blind? do they not both fall into the ditch? The disciple is not above his master, but every one shall be perfect, if he be as his master.

And why seest thou the mote in thy brother's eye, but the beam that is in thy own eye thou considerest not? Or how canst thou say to thy brother, Brother, let me pull the mote out of thy eye, when thou thyself seest not the beam in thy own eye? Hypocrite, cast first the beam out of thy own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to take out the mote from thy brother's eye.

For there is no good tree that bringeth forth evil fruit, nor an evil tree that bringeth forth good fruit. For every tree is known by its fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor from a bramble bush do they gather the grape. A good man out

of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good, and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth that which is evil. For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.

And why call you Me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? Every one that cometh to Me, and heareth My words, and doth them, I will show you to whom he is like. He is like to a man building a house, who digged deep, and laid the foundation upon a rock, and when a flood came, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and it could not shake it, for it was founded on a rock. But he that heareth, and doth not, is like to a man building his house upon the earth without a foundation, against which the stream beat vehemently, and immediately it fell, and the ruin of that house was great.

§ 50.—*The Centurion's Servant.*

Luke vii. 1—10.

And when He had finished all His words in the hearing of the people, He entered into Capharnaum. And the servant of a certain centurion, who was dear to him, being sick, was ready to die. And when he had heard of Jesus, he sent to Him the ancients of the Jews, desiring Him to come and heal his servant. And when they came to Jesus, they besought Him earnestly, saying to Him, He is worthy that Thou shouldest do this for him. For he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue.

And Jesus went with them. And when He was now not far from the house, the centurion sent his friends to Him, saying, Lord, trouble not Thyself, for I am not worthy

that Thou shouldest enter under my roof. For which cause neither did I think myself worthy to come to Thee, but say the word, and my servant shall be healed. For I also am a man subject to authority, having under me soldiers, and I say to this, Go, and he goeth, and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it.

And Jesus hearing this marvelled, and turning about to the multitude that followed Him, He said, Amen I say to you, I have not found so great faith, not even in Israel.

And they who were sent, being returned to the house, found the servant whole who had been sick.

Matt. viii. 5—13.

(Another account.)

And when He had entered into Capharnaum, there came to Him a centurion, beseeching Him, and saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, and is grievously tormented. And Jesus said to him, I will come and heal him.

And the centurion making answer, said, Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldest enter under my roof, but only say the word, and my servant shall be healed. For I also am a man subject to authority, having under me soldiers,

and I say to this, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh, and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it.

And Jesus hearing this, marvelled, and said to them that followed Him, Amen I say to you, I have not found so great faith in Israel.

And I say to you that many shall come from the east and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be

Matt. viii. 12—13.

cast out into the exterior darkness, there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

And Jesus said to the cen-

Mark iii. 20, 21.

And they came to a house, and the multitude cometh together again, so that they could not so much as eat bread. And when His friends

turion, Go, and as thou hast believed, so be it done to thee. And the servant was healed at the same hour.

§ 51.—*The Widow's Son raised.*

Luke vii. 11—16

And it came to pass afterwards that He went into a city that is called Naim, and there went with Him His disciples and a great multitude. And when He came nigh to the gate of the city, behold a dead man was carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow: and a great multitude of the city was with her. Whom when the Lord had seen, being moved with mercy towards her, He said to her,

Weep not. And He came near and touched the bier. And they that carried it, stood still. And He said, Young man, I say to thee, arise. And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And He gave him to his mother. And there came a fear on them all, and they glorified God, saying, a great prophet is risen up among us, and God hath visited His people.

§ 52.—*The disciples of St. John sent to our Lord.*

Matt. xi. 2—6.

Luke vii. 17—23.

And this rumour of Him went forth throughout all Judæa, and throughout all the country round about. And John's disciples told him of all these things.

Now when John had heard in prison the works of Christ,

And John called to him two of his disciples, and sent

sending two of his disciples, he said to Him, Art Thou He that art to come, or look we for another?

them to Jesus, saying, Art Thou He that art to come, or look we for another? And when the men were come unto Him, they said, John the Baptist hath sent us to Thee, saying, Art Thou He that art to come, or look we for another?

(And in that same hour, He healed many of their diseases, and hurts, and evil spirits, and to many that were blind He gave sight.)

And answering, He said to them, Go and relate to John what you have heard and seen. 'The blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are made clean, the deaf hear, the dead rise again, the poor have the Gospel preached to them.' And blessed is he that shall not be scandalized in Me.

§ 53.—*Our Lord's witness to St. John Baptist.*

Matt. xi. 7—15.

And when they went their way, Jesus began to speak to the multitudes concerning John, What went you out into the desert to see? a reed shaken with the wind? But what went you out to see? a man clothed in soft garments? Behold, they that are clothed in soft garments are in the houses of kings. But what went you out to see? a prophet? yea, I tell you, and more than a prophet. For this is he of whom it is written, Behold I send My Angel

Luke vii. 24—35.

And when the messengers of John were departed, He began to speak to the multitudes concerning John. What went you out into the desert to see? a reed shaken with the wind? But what went you out to see? a man clothed in soft garments? Behold, they that are in costly apparel and live delicately, are in the houses of kings. But what went you out to see? a prophet? Yea, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is he of whom it is

¹ Isaías xxix. 18, 19; xxxv. 5, 6; lxi. 1; xxvi. 19.

Matt. xi. 11—19.

before Thy face, who shall prepare Thy way before Thee.² Amen I say to you, there hath not risen among them that are born of women a greater than John the Baptist, yet he that is the lesser in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

And from the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if you will receive it, He is Elias that is to come. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

But whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like to children sitting in the market-place, who crying to their companions, say, We have piped to you, and you have not danced, we have lamented, and you have not mourned. For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He hath a devil. The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man that is a glutton and a wine-drinker, a friend of publicans and sinners. And wisdom is justified by her children.

Luke vii. 27—35.

written, Behold I send My Angel before Thy face, who shall prepare Thy way before Thee. For I say to you, Amongst those that are born of women, there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist. But he that is the lesser in the kingdom of God, is greater than he.

And all the people hearing, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with John's baptism. But the Pharisees and the lawyers despised the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized by him.

And the Lord said, Whereunto then shall I liken the men of this generation? and to what are they like? They are like to children sitting in the market-place, and crying one to another, and saying, We have piped to you, and you have not danced, we have lamented, and you have not wept. For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, He hath a devil. The Son of Man is come eating and drinking, and you say, Behold a man that is a glutton and a wine-drinker,

² Mal. iii. 1.

Luke vii. 35.

a friend of publicans and sinners. And wisdom is justified by all her children.

§ 54.—*The proud condemned and the humble chosen.*

Matt. xi. 20—30.

Then began He to upbraid the cities wherein were done the most of His miracles, for that they had not done penance. Wo to thee, Corozain, wo to thee, Bethsaida, for if in Tyre and Sidon had been wrought the miracles that have been wrought in you, they had long ago done penance in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you. And thou, Capharnaum, shalt thou be exalted up to heaven? thou shalt go down even unto hell. For if in Sodom had been wrought the miracles that have been wrought in thee, perhaps it had remained unto this day. But I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee.

At that time Jesus answered and said, I confess to Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them to little ones. Yea, Father, for so hath it seemed good in Thy sight. All things are delivered to Me by My Father. And no one knoweth the Son, but the Father, neither doth any one know the Father but the Son, and he to whom it shall please the Son to reveal Him. Come to Me all you that labour, and are burdened, and I will refresh you. Take up My yoke upon you, and learn of Me, because I am meek, and humble of heart, and you shall find rest to your souls. For My yoke is sweet, and My burden light.

§ 55.—*Mary Magdalene comes to our Lord.*

Luke vii. 36—50; viii. 1—3.

And one of the Pharisees desired Him to eat with him. And He went into the house of the Pharisee, and sat down to meat.

And behold a woman that was in the city, a sinner, when she knew that He sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of

Luke vii. 38—50.

ointment, and standing behind at His feet, she began to wash His feet with tears, and wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed His feet, and anointed them with the ointment.

And the Pharisee, who had invited Him, seeing it, spoke within himself, saying, This man, if He were a prophet, would know surely who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth Him, that she is a sinner.

And Jesus answering, said to him, Simon, I have somewhat to say to thee. But he said, Master, say it. A certain creditor had two debtors, the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And whereas they had not wherewith to pay, he forgave them both. Which therefore of the two loveth him most?

Simon, answering, said, I suppose that he to whom he forgave most. And He said

to him, Thou hast judged rightly.

And turning to the woman, He said unto Simon, Dost thou see this woman? I entered into thy house, thou gavest Me no water for My feet; but she with tears hath washed My feet, and with her hair hath wiped them. Thou gavest Me no kiss, but she, since she came in, hath not ceased to kiss My feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint, but she with ointment hath anointed My feet. Wherefore I say to thee, Many sins are forgiven her, because she hath loved much. But to whom less is forgiven, he loveth less.

And He said to her, Thy sins are forgiven thee.

And they that sat at meat with Him began to say within themselves, Who is this that forgiveth sins also? And He said to the woman, Thy faith hath made thee safe, go in peace.

Luke viii. 1—3.

And it came to pass, afterwards, that He travelled through the cities and towns, preaching and evangelizing the kingdom of God, and the twelve with Him. And certain women who had been healed of evil spirits and in-

firmities, Mary, who is called Magdalene, out of whom seven devils were gone forth, and Joanna, the wife of Chusa, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others who ministered unto Him of their substance.

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